



THE PRODIGAL SON.

See page 93.

2910

AN
EXPLANATION
OF THE
PRINCIPAL PARABLES
OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT.

INTENDED FOR THE YOUNG.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

A PARABLE, in a general sense, is a similitude taken from natural objects, to instruct us in the knowledge of spiritual things. But, when applied to our Saviour's parables, it signifies a short narration of some real or probable event, in which a comparison is carried on between sensible and spiritual objects, for the purpose of conveying and enforcing some important doctrine of a moral or religious nature.

The parables of Jesus Christ relate to subjects that concern God, the soul, and eternity; they are, in the highest degree, affecting and instructive; and all their images and allusions are taken from the works of God, and from occurrences most familiar with our own observation and experience in common life. The events narrated not only might have happened, but it is supposed some of them actually did.

While the parables are admirably fitted to instruct all who read them, they are especially adapted to instruct and affect the hearts of the young. Hence it will be found that, in most cases, they make a deep impression, and are easily retained in their memories. It becomes, therefore, a matter of great importance, to explain and impress on their consciences, the invaluable lessons which they were meant to convey.

It is the object of the author of this small volume to attempt this, by adapting not only the explanations, but also the practical observations, to the capacities of the young, and to show the intimate connexion existing between the doctrines and duties of true religion.



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PARABLES EXPLAINED.



THE PARABLE OF THE TWO FOUNDATIONS.

MATTHEW VII. 24—27.

MOST of my young readers know, that the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew contain what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. We are told, in chap. v. 1, 2, that "seeing the multitudes, Jesus went up into a mountain; and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: and he opened his mouth, and taught them." The land of Israel, where the

Saviour appeared, is very mountainous; so much so, that "the mountains of Israel" are often mentioned in the Old Testament, when the whole land is meant, Ezek. vi. 3; xxxvi. 1. And the mountains were the scene of some of the most interesting circumstances of the Saviour's life. At one time, "He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God," Luke vi. 12. At another time, when a great multitude had assembled on a mountain, he wrought a miracle in order to satisfy their hunger, John vi. 3—14. On the occasion we are considering, he chose a mountain as a place for preaching.

Probably no house could have contained the crowds of people that were gathered together to hear him. And no situation could have been found more favourable for the purpose. There was abundance of room for the multitude there. No objects were passing by to divert their attention from the word of God. What they saw was fitted to remind them of Him, "who by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power," Psal. lxxv. 6: "who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains, and herb for the service of man," Psal. cxlvii. 8; civ. 14. They would think of the time when their fathers in the wilderness saw the glory of God on Mount Sinai, and heard his voice speaking the words of that law which they were to obey, Exod. xix. 16—25; xx. 1—17. It was also the voice of God which they were now called to hear, speaking to them by his Son, and explaining that very law which had been given to their fathers. But here was no smoke or fire, to prevent them from seeing the speaker: there was no sound of a trumpet, long and loud, to make them tremble. The heavenly Teacher, whom they now heard, taught them as one having authority; yet he was meek and lowly in heart. And though, perhaps, many of them thought that he was only a human prophet; yet, doubtless, there were some who had long looked for his coming, and who would now think that these beautiful words were beginning to be accomplished:—"O Zion,

that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young," Isa. xl. 9—11.

Those words which I wish to explain, are the last part of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, and as such they seem particularly suitable. He had been giving directions as to many important duties, so plain that none could be at a loss to understand him. The multitude of his hearers was now about to separate. They were all astonished at his doctrine, Matt. vii. 28; and were ready to say, "Never man spake like this man." But the Saviour wished them to understand, that it was not enough only to admire his wisdom, while they felt no desire to be made wise themselves. It might be said of the hundreds who then heard him, as of every congregation who hear the gospel now, that "some believed the things that were spoken, and some believed not." When young persons are attentive to the sermons they hear, and seem to find pleasure in listening to the truth, it is very gratifying to their Christian friends; yet it does not fully satisfy their anxious wishes. Let such young persons give serious attention to this solemn part of the Saviour's words.

The Saviour here describes two houses, built by two different persons. They were so much alike, that they might have been supposed to be built in the same way. But there was a great difference between the foundations of the two. And the youngest of my readers must know, that it is not enough to build strong walls, or to fasten them well together. Such a building might look very well, while the sun shone upon it, and when the air was calm. But when a storm of wind and rain

began to beat upon it, "it fell, and great was the fall of it:" if it was lofty and fair to look upon before, so much greater would be the noise occasioned by its falling. The same storm blew upon the other house: "but it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock." The builder had dug deep into the earth, and had laid the first stones upon solid rock, so that no storm could ever shake it.

But let us think of the different circumstances of those who lived in these two houses. The man who inhabited the house built upon the sand, would see the black clouds gathering together. He might anxiously look for the sun to shine out and scatter them; but, instead of this, the gloom would increase, till the rain began to pour in torrents. The wind would at first seem trifling, and he might try to persuade himself that it was only a gentle breeze, which could not affect his dwelling. Yet, knowing its unsafe foundation, it would be impossible to feel altogether secure. The sound of every increasing blast would reach his heart, and make him tremble. It could give him no comfort to think how much his friends had admired the neat appearance of his habitation. He would begin to find the floor shaking under his feet; and while he stood trembling with terror, and unable to escape, he would suddenly be crushed among the falling stones. Or, if we can suppose that to the last he had no fear of danger, his destruction would not be at all less dreadful. He might be so foolish as to fancy that his crazy tenement could withstand all the violence of the tempest; he might even go to rest on his bed, thinking of what he should do when he rose in the morning; but his rest would be speedily and awfully interrupted.

What, then, were the feelings of the man who inhabited the other house mentioned by our Lord? He too would see that a storm was likely to come. And the dismal howling of the winds must have sounded in his ears, gradually increasing to the loudness of thunder. But he could calmly sit, and listen to the blast, without the

least alarm. The pouring rain, or the flooded mountain stream, might dash around his walls; but they could not wash them away, for they were fixed on the solid rock, far below the ground. He might feel pity for those who had no shelter in such a storm; but the very recollection of their situation would only make him more thankful for his own. Perhaps the gloomy appearance of the sky, and the fearful rushing of the tempest, might for a moment alarm him; but when he thought of the rock on which his dwelling rested, his confidence would soon return; nay, he would become more confident, as he found that, though the storm increased, he was still safe.

The Saviour plainly declares, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." "And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand." Now let us try to understand how those two different characters resembled the two builders here mentioned.

He who built upon the rock is called a wise man. All who are truly wise will hear the sayings of Christ, and do them. The men of the world may despise such persons, and call them foolish; but the God of truth himself declares that they are wise, Job xxviii. 28; Prov. x. 8. Before any one will do the sayings of Christ, he must believe them all. The following are some of those sayings:—"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now, the person who believes these sayings will, of course, trust in Christ, and in him alone, as the Saviour of sinners: his hope of being saved will rest upon Christ, just as the house which has been spoken of rested on a rock. And this is not the only part of the Bible in which Christ is compared to a

rock, and those who believe in him are represented as building on him. In Isa. xxviii. 16, we read, "Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." In 1 Cor. iii. 11, it is said, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." There are many other passages of Scripture similar to these. "The rock of our salvation" is an expression frequently used in the Old Testament.

But as it is of great importance that my young readers should understand what is meant by building upon this rock, I will try to explain it a little further. When a sinner begins to believe the sayings of Christ, he is alarmed at the prospect of being cast into hell with sinners, where their worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched. He desires to be saved from that dreadful misery; but the Bible tells him that "the wages of sin is death;" and how can he escape it who has committed so many sins? He reads again, "Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust," 1 Pet. iii. 18. "Jesus delivered us from the wrath to come," 1 Thess. i. 10. Believing these things, he does hope that he may escape from hell; and thus his hope of being saved *rests* upon the death of Christ. He is persuaded that in God's favour is life, and that his loving-kindness is better than life; and he earnestly desires to have God for his friend. But the Bible declares, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. Then how can he hope for the favour and friendship of God? He reads again, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," Gal. iii. 13. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," 2 Cor. v. 19. He finds comfort in believing these declarations; and thus his hope of obtaining God's favour *rests* upon Christ having borne the displeasure of God against sin.

I must not dwell too long on this part of the subject; what I have said may help to show how it is, that the soul is safe and happy in resting or building on Christ. And let it be observed, this is not merely the best way to be safe; it is the only way. "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," Acts iv. 11, 12.

And as Christ is the only foundation for comfort and safety, so he is the only foundation for holiness of heart and goodness of life. No sinner can believe that the Son of God loved him, and gave himself for him, without loving him in return. And as soon as he begins to love him, he will begin to feel pleasure in doing whatever is pleasing to him. Sin must become hateful to him, when he believes that it caused the Saviour's sufferings. And believing that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John iii. 3, he will pray earnestly, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me," Psal. li. 10. God has promised to answer this prayer, Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27, 37. He has also promised to give his Holy Spirit to those that ask him, Luke xi. 13; and the Saviour declares, that that heavenly Comforter should dwell with his people at all times, to instruct them in all truth, John xiv. 26. When a person is thus taught to love God, and to remember his commands, every duty will be fulfilled in its proper time: so that his obedience may be compared to a stately building, resting on a good foundation, and complete in every part. It is true, that a believer in Jesus is not entirely free from sin in this world; but it is his greatest grief that he should ever neglect any thing which would please his best Friend. And knowing that he has no strength of his own to do any thing aright, he will be continually depending on his grace, which is sufficient for him. Thus he not only built his hope

upon Christ at first, but continues resting upon him as long as he lives.*

Storms of temptation will often arise ; that is, he may be in the midst of people who urge him to commit sin, and laugh at him if he refuses ; or he may fancy that he would obtain great worldly advantages from doing something that is sinful. But even then, the good foundation on which he is built will save him from falling into sin. When thus tempted, he will cry the more earnestly to Christ for help ; and through him he will "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need," Heb. iv. 16. Storms of affliction, too, he must expect to feel ; one trouble may come upon him after another, like floods of great waters. But "surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." God is his hiding-place : He shall preserve him from trouble ; He shall compass him about with songs of deliverance, Psa. xxxii. 6, 7. He may lose his dearest friends ; but he has a Father in heaven, and "a Friend who sticketh closer than a brother." He may be poor ; but he is yet without carefulness, casting all his care upon Him who careth for him ; and believing that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." He feels sorrow at the death of friends, as well as other men ; and poverty or pain is in itself as distressing to him as to others. But then he has learned to love God, and to submit readily to all his will ; because he is sure, that after having given his dearly beloved Son to die for him, he will never deprive him of any thing that would really make him happy. And though he does not see the reason of all his Father's dealings with him, yet he cannot doubt that whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and that he chastens him for his profit, that he may be a partaker of his holiness, Heb. xii. 6—10. He is content to bear patiently all that can befall him on earth, knowing that in heaven "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain," Rev. xxi. 4.

* See Parable of the Vine and the Branches.

And there he hopes to dwell with Him whom he loves better than any creature in the world. This prospect makes death appear welcome. He is not afraid to die, because Christ destroyed death, and him that had the power of death; that is, the devil, Heb. ii. 14. It is sin which makes death dreadful; but he believes that the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin, 1 John i. 7. He can think with pleasure of appearing before God, because he knows that the Saviour "ever liveth to make intercession for them that come unto God by him," Heb. vii. 25. Death is sometimes compared to deep and dark waters; but even these cannot separate him from Christ, his strong Rock. And when the earth itself shall pass away, and the awful storm of Divine wrath shall burst upon the enemies of God, the believer will still remain unmoved: for in the midst of that dreadful overthrow, he will behold the Saviour in whom he believed, and who is able to keep that which he has committed unto him against that day, 2 Tim. i. 12.

My dear children, you see how happy and how safe those are, who "hear Christ's sayings, and do them." Should you not rejoice, that the youngest child who hears them is as welcome to build on the Rock of ages as the oldest person? And though you have not yet felt many of the storms we have been speaking of, you cannot live long without feeling them. Surely it is very desirable, that before they arise, you should be able to say, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof," Psal. xvi. 1—3. Or, if you should die soon, if you have believed in Christ, death will only be an early removal from all sin and sorrow, to that place where there is no night, not even a single cloud, for evermore. Oh! then, be persuaded now to seek rest in Jesus. Be assured, that the cheerful sunshine of

childhood will be far more delightful if you employ it in building upon him. This is the only way to be really dutiful to your parents, and attentive to every thing else which can make your friends esteem and love you. And thus only can you be enabled to serve and please your Father in heaven.

But I greatly fear that many young persons too much resemble the man who built his house upon the sand. They hear the sayings of Christ from their parents or teachers, and from their ministers, but they do them not. And yet, as this man's house appeared to resemble the other, so they may persuade themselves and others, that they really do obey the Saviour's commands. They may enter into the closet every morning and evening, and having shut the door, they may kneel down to pray, Matt. vi. 6. They may carefully avoid swearing, Matt. v. 34—37; and even reprove their companions, if they should swear. They may willingly part with their money to feed the poor, Matt. vi. 1—4; nay, they may seem to pity the heathen children, and be very active in collecting pence and halfpence, to assist in sending good men to tell them of the Saviour. And so, in many other things, they may strictly attend to the sayings of Christ. But all this apparent goodness is only outward, it has no foundation. We might pity a man who built and adorned a dwelling which the first blast might throw down, because he knew no better. But the folly of such conduct as we have been describing appears the greater, when we consider that the Bible gives the plainest directions about the only safe foundation, and also about the proper way of building upon it.

When you have been naughty at any time, and displeased your father, have you not watched for an opportunity of doing something that was likely to please? You ran to fetch him any thing he wanted, or you asked him to hear you read, or you began to tell him that you had risen higher in your class. But all would not do; your father thought it necessary to show his dis-

pleasure at your fault, and he would not even smile on you. Now, this may somewhat help you to understand what is meant by saying, that no good works done by a sinner can be pleasing to God, unless they are built upon Christ. God is justly displeased with sinners; they are in disgrace with him. Sin is that thing which he hates; and until their sins are forgiven, he cannot have any pleasure in their apparent endeavours to serve him. But to return to your own case: when you have disobeyed your father, has not your elder brother, or sister, or some kind friend, taken you by the hand, brought you to your parent, and begged him to forgive your fault? And though before you might have cared little about what you had done, have you not then begun to feel ashamed and grieved, while you heard your friend thus pleading for you? Did not the big tears begin to roll down your cheeks, while you then earnestly entreated forgiveness yourself? Now, Jesus Christ, God's beloved Son, offers to take every sinner by the hand, and bring him back to the favour of God. More than this, he has really suffered the punishment which their sins deserved, in order that their sins might be forgiven. He has shed his blood; for God had declared, that "without shedding of blood is no remission," Heb. ix. 22. And it is only when a sinner believes this, and thus sees the love and kindness of the Saviour, that he feels truly sorry for having offended God, and begins in earnest to desire his favour.

But suppose that you had refused to let any one lead you to your father, and sullenly determined that you would either please him in your own way, or let him continue to be angry with you. Now, this resembles the conduct of those whom we are describing: they refuse Christ's help; they harden their hearts against all the love he has shown, and all the sufferings he has endured; they will not repent of their sins; and they proudly determine that they will obtain the favour of God by good works of their own. But he

has declared, that "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified," Gal. ii. 16; and that "without faith it is impossible to please him," Heb. xi. 6.

My dear reader, if this be your way of acting, you forget that mere outward attention to your duty is not enough in the sight of God. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart," 1 Sam. xvi. 7. Now, the first of all the commandments is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength," Mark xii. 29, 30. And if he sees that you do not love him in your heart, your outward obedience to any other of his commands will not satisfy him. Saying of prayers is not that praying to your Father who seeth in secret, which Christ enjoined; for "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth," John iv. 24. It is right to avoid profane swearing; but you take his name in vain when you pray to him with your lips, while your hearts are far from him. And though you bestow all your goods to feed the poor, and though you give your body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth you nothing, 1 Cor. xiii. 3. Remember, too, that even the spiritual services of those who love God are still imperfect; they are not entirely free from sin. So that here again they need to rest on Christ, that through his merit and intercession their works may be accepted.

And have *you* never met with storms of temptation, that have shaken your best resolutions, and overthrown all your intentions of behaving well? Have your companions never persuaded you to take a walk on the sabbath, by assuring you that your parent or teacher would not know of it? Or if you felt at all unwilling to consent, was it not merely from your fear of being found out? When any thing particularly nice has been left in your way, so that you could take a part of it without its being missed, have you not taken it? though you knew that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding

the evil and the good;" and that he has said, "Thou shalt not steal." If you have broken or spoiled any thing, have not you thought it pleasanter to tell a lie, and say that you did not know it, than to bear the blame? In such cases as these, you must have found, that your building could not stand against the wind of temptation.

And how could you bear the storms of affliction? If your parents were to die, and leave you orphans, you could not look up to a heavenly Father: you are like the child just described, who having displeased his parent, yet refuses the help of the friend who would gladly restore him to favour. If you should become poor, and be deprived of such food and clothing as you are accustomed to have, what is there to give you any comfort, or keep you from fretting and murmuring? You have not believed the sayings of Christ, so that his promises could give you no hope; nor indeed would you have any right to take encouragement from them in your temporal distress. Sickness and death must be very alarming to you, for you have never been fixed on Christ, the Rock of ages; and there is nothing else which can support you amidst the deep waters of death. Even if you had a hope of heaven, it could afford you no pleasure to think of dwelling for ever with Him, whom you have never loved. But if you should continue till you die to expect the favour of God, on account of your own outward goodness, your destruction will only be the more awfully sudden: "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy," Prov. xxix. 1.

"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment," Heb. ix. 27. We read of a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, Rev. xx. 11. And when this shall take place, what will there be for a poor sinful child to cling to? How will the sight of the Judge terrify and confound you, when you recollect that he was willing to set your feet upon a rock, and to

establish your goings, but that you preferred your own sandy foundation! Whatever you may fancy now, you will then be convinced of your folly; for "many will say to Christ in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will he profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity," Matt. vii. 22, 23.

And what, my dear children, is the intention of telling you these solemn truths? What was it that made the Saviour utter the words we have been considering? Was it not that all might be led to examine whether they are secure against the dangers of this world, and the terrors of the next? that if they should find they have no such security, they may be persuaded instantly to seek for safety where alone it can be found. Do not say that you are sure you are right, and that this is a matter which does not concern you: if there had not been great danger of mistake, probably the Saviour would not thus have spoken. Oh, think of his love to sinners; consider that your souls must live for ever; and ask yourselves whether you would be in the forlorn situation of one driven forth without a shelter, if not buried in the ruins of his dwelling; and not rather be found among the number of those who are received by Christ into his Father's house, where are many mansions. May the Holy Spirit lead you to Christ now, while he waits to save you! and then, in every storm, you may cheerfully sing, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation," Isa. xii. 2.





THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATTHEW XIII. 3—9, 18—23.

THIS parable, my young readers, is one which you may easily understand, if you will pay attention to the different parts of it. You have often seen a path through a cornfield; and you can readily imagine how some of the seed might fall on the path, while the sower was scattering it. The birds would soon pick it up, and either eat it, or carry it away. I dare say you have seen, in some fields, a part that was very stony, and where there was very little earth, so that corn would not grow. Then, again, you know that if corn were sown among bushes and brambles, it could not thrive. And you know too, that when the ground is good, after it has been ploughed, and sown, and harrowed, then there is plenty of corn to cut down in harvest time.

We are told, in Matt. xiii. 2, that "great multitudes" of people heard this parable. But the Saviour afterwards explained the meaning of it to his own disciples by themselves. The word disciple means scholars; and though you cannot now see the Saviour, yet you may still be his scholars, and learn of him. The explanation which he gave of this parable is written in the Bible, on purpose that you and every child who reads that blessed book, may understand his meaning, as well as those who heard him at first. Read from verse 18 to verse 23.

The sower sowing his seed, is like a minister preaching the gospel; and when you hear a sermon, and forget it all, then it may be said that "the wicked one cometh, and catcheth away that which was sown in your hearts." Observe, it is when people do not understand what they hear, that the wicked one catches it away. Now, you must not think, that because you are children, you cannot understand any thing of the sermons you hear. Good ministers are pleased, when they see children attentive to what they are saying; they sometimes preach sermons on purpose for children, and they always try to use such plain and easy words as every one of their hearers may understand.

It is very naughty to be talking, or playing with your books, or looking about you, while you are hearing a sermon. God is displeased with such as do so. You should look at the preacher; and if you will take notice, a little while after he has begun to preach, you will generally hear him mention two or three things which he is going to speak about: and he will most likely say, "In the first place, in the second place, in the third place," etc. The things that are mentioned in this way, are called the divisions, or the heads of the sermon. I have known children, much younger than most of those who are likely to read this, who could always tell the heads of the sermon when they came home; and if you would try to remember them, it would help you to remember and understand all the

rest. Many of you can write: now, if you were to write down, when you are at home on the sabbath day, what you remember of the sermons you have heard, you might read it over, and ask your parents to explain it to you through the week. Above all, pray earnestly to God that he would teach you to understand his own word; and you may be sure that he will listen to the prayer of the youngest child who really desires to be taught by his Spirit. If you will read, *Psa. cxix.*, you will find many petitions for assistance to understand the word of God, particularly verses 12, 18, 64, 68, 73, 125, 169.

The seed sown on stony ground is like those people who are quite pleased with some sermons that they have heard, and who seem all at once to become very religious. They begin to read their Bibles every day, and to go regularly to public worship. They will not walk in the fields on the sabbath, or go to races and fairs. But though their conduct is so different from what it was before, their hearts are not changed. Though they do many good things, it is not because they love Jesus Christ, and are anxious to please him. And so if their acquaintances begin to laugh at them, or any of their friends are unkind to them, because they do not act as they did formerly, they cannot bear it. They give up their religion altogether; and this shows that it has been like the corn that grew on the stony ground; it was all on the outside, having no root within. My young reader, has this ever been the case with you? Have not you sometimes tried to do what the preacher told you was your duty; but when some of your companions found it out they laughed at you, and you continued to do what you knew to be wrong rather than be laughed at? The Bible tells us that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus" must expect to be ridiculed, and even sometimes very ill used, by those who hate true religion: but if you had really loved Jesus Christ, he would have been your friend; and you would have found, that he could make you

happy, even though every earthly friend had treated you unkindly.

Those people who begin to think or talk about their worldly business as soon as they leave a place of worship, may be said to "receive seed among thorns." And though those who read this may be too young to have any business to do, or to think of trying to become rich, yet there are many things which may "choke the word," even in them. If you are thinking about your play more than about what the minister is saying; or if you are wishing that the sermon were done, that you may tell your companions about some new clothes you expect to get, it is very unlikely that you can be the better for what you have heard.

"He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit," etc. You see it is not enough to remember and understand what a preacher of the gospel says; you should also put it in practice. If he tells you that you should seek the salvation of your souls, and yet you still continue careless about it, you are not bringing forth fruit; and I will tell you what God says about those who hear his word again and again, and yet bring forth no fruit: "For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned," Heb. vi. 7, 8. These are very awful words.

But, perhaps, you would tell me, that you have sometimes wished very much to be good children; that you have tried to pray and to think about good things, but you could not; and you think it so very difficult to be truly religious, that it is of no use for you to try to be so. Now, the reason why you have found it so difficult is, that your hearts are wicked; and if you were to try all your lives, you could never make them any better. But Jesus Christ came into the

world on purpose to save sinners such as you. He invites you to come to him, just as you are; and he is able to change your hearts, and to make you love what is good. He can give you his Holy Spirit, to teach you to understand what the Bible says. He knows all you think, and all that you feel, even better than you do yourselves. In short, he is exactly such a Saviour as you need; and you may be assured, my dear children, that until you believe what God has told you about him, and trust in him as your best Friend, you will never bring forth good fruit.





THE PARABLE OF THE TARES.

MATTHEW XIII. 24—30, 36—43.

If you remember what was said about the parable of the sower, you will the more easily understand this one. The field where the good seed was sowed means this world. The man that sowed represents the Lord Jesus Christ: this world is all his; and when he came to this earth, he sowed the good seed; that is, he preached the gospel to men. And though he is not on earth now, the same gospel is still preached; and this is done by his servants, because he commanded them to do so. The enemy who sowed the tares is the devil. He is the enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as of the souls of men; and all those people who do not love Jesus Christ, and will not have him for their Saviour, are the devil's servants. These servants of his are very willing to do whatever he pleases; and he

employs many of them in trying to prevent the good seed from growing, by sowing bad seed amongst it.

They have various ways of doing this. Your teachers, and the preachers of the gospel, tell you that you are sinners, and that God is angry with you for your sins; but other people will often foolishly tell you, that you have never done any harm, that your hearts are good, and that certainly God will not punish such young innocent creatures as you. The servants of Christ assure you, that you can never be happy till you believe in him, and walk in his ways; but you will sometimes be told by ignorant people, that religion is a very gloomy thing, and that you should take your pleasure while you are young, and leave religion till you are older. Now, what such persons tell you will please you much better than what the servants of Christ tell you; but if what they say be different from what God says in the Bible, it cannot be true. "God cannot lie," but the devil has been a liar from the beginning.

Take notice of the difference between the plants that grew from the good, and from the bad seed. The one grew into corn, and the other into tares,* which were useless weeds. The Saviour explains the corn

* "It is highly probable that it is the *darnel*, (in Latin *lolium*,) that species called by botanists *temulentum*, which grows among corn, which is here intended. For first, this appears to be the Latin word, by which the Greek was wont to be interpreted. Secondly, it agrees to the characters above mentioned. It is a noxious weed; for when the seeds happen to be mingled and ground with the corn, the bread made with this mixture always occasions sickness and giddiness in those who eat it; and the straw has the same effect upon the cattle; it is from this quality, and the appearance of drunkenness which it produces, that it is termed *ivraie* in French, and has the specific name *temulentum* given it by botanists. It is well known to the people at Aleppo, says Forskal; the reapers do not separate the plant, but after the threshing they reject the seeds by means of a van or sieve. Other travellers mention, that in some parts of Syria the plant is drawn up by the hand in the time of harvest along with the wheat, and is then gathered out and bound in separate bundles. In the parable of the tares, our Lord states the very same circumstances; they grew among the grain; they were not separated by the tillers, but suffered to grow up together till the harvest; they were then gathered from among the wheat, and bound up in bundles."—*Scripture Natural History*.

to mean the children of God, and the tares to mean the children of the wicked one. The servants knew the difference between the corn and the tares when they both grew up; and so it is quite possible to know who are God's children, and who are not. If you believe those who speak the truth as it is in the Bible, you will immediately seek to have your sins forgiven, and your hearts changed; you will love Jesus Christ, who died upon the cross to obtain these blessings for you; and because you love him, you will keep the sabbath holy, you will obey your parents, and try at all times to do everything else that is right. But if you believe the lies of Satan, you will think that you have no need of a Saviour, and will expect to be happy, even while you are breaking God's commandments. Your conduct will show that these are your thoughts; you will trifle and play on the sabbath; and when you are at school, or at public worship, you will pay no attention to what you hear: though you may sometimes obey your parents, and speak the truth, it will only be when it happens to suit your own inclination; at other times you will readily be guilty of lying and disobedience. You see you must be either the children of God, or the children of the wicked one; there is no other sort of people spoken of in the Bible. And do you not tremble at the very thought of having Satan for your father?

You remember that the man in the parable would not allow his servants to root up the tares immediately, but desired that they and the corn should remain together till the harvest. This means, that God allows both good and bad people to live together in this world for a time. He does not send people to hell as soon as they show themselves to be the children of the wicked one, because "he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." How soon do the young begin to show that they are Satan's children! for the Bible says that "the wicked go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies;" and

Satan is called the father of lies. Yet God has spared you till now; he has given you many opportunities of learning the truth, which is able to save your souls; and are you still believing those who advise you to put off attending to religion till you are older? Remember, God has already had long patience with you; and, perhaps, he may not bear with you much longer. Some few persons live in this world for seventy, or even eighty years; but a far greater number die while they are young.

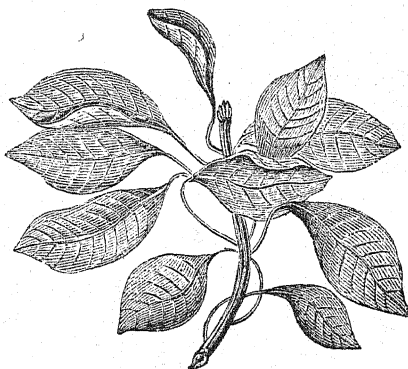
It was not till the harvest that the tares were gathered and burned in the fire; and the Saviour tells us, that the harvest means the end of the world, or the day of judgment. When this may be we cannot tell; but you should never forget, that in whatever state your souls are when you die, they will be found in the very same state at the last day. If you die the children of the wicked one, you will be among those whom the angels shall cast into a furnace of fire, where "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." That is the place where Satan dwells, and there all his children must remain with him for ever.

But after the useless tares had been gathered, and burned in the fire, the wheat was carefully reaped, and laid up in the barn. This represents the children of God being carried to heaven to dwell with their Father. And the Saviour says, that then they shall "shine forth as the sun." In the Bible, darkness often means sorrow, and light means joy and happiness. So we are to understand here, that in heaven there will not only be no more grief or pain, but that there will be perfect happiness; though the children of God may have been poor and mean in this world, they will appear all bright and glorious in heaven.

I am sure you all desire to reach that delightful place; but observe what those are called who are to shine forth there as the sun: in verse 43, they are called "righteous." When any persons are called so in the Bible, it means that God has pardoned

them, made them holy, and is well pleased with them. It means that they are somewhat like himself, loving what is good, and hating what is evil. You know that children generally resemble their parents. The children of the devil are like him, and do as he does; and the children of God are also like their Father, and delight to do his will. But how did they become righteous? for the Bible says that "there is none righteous, no, not one." How can you be made righteous? My dear reader, that is the most important question that you can possibly ask. I must try to give you an answer to it. It is indeed true that you have no righteousness of your own; but Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, is the Righteous One. His whole life on earth was spent in doing the will of God his Father, who has declared that he is well pleased with him. He also died instead of sinners, suffering the punishment that they deserved. When any sinner believes these things, and trusts in him as his Saviour, his sins are not only forgiven, but the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to him as if it were his own. He becomes righteous in the sight of God, the same as if he had himself perfectly obeyed the Divine law; and at the same time, his heart is changed, so that he begins to hate every sin, and to take delight in all that is holy.

Unless you are thus made righteous, you can never be the children of God, or shine forth as the sun in his kingdom. Satan and his servants may tell you, that if you do your duty as well as you can, God will require no more; but do not believe them; for the Bible declares, that "there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," but the name of Jesus, Acts iv. 12. But "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him," Heb. vii. 25.



PARABLES OF THE GRAIN OF MUSTARD
SEED, AND THE LEAVEN.

MATTHEW XIII. 31—33.

I DARE say none of my readers ever saw a tree that had grown from a grain of mustard-seed. The above is a picture of a branch of the mustard-tree.* Such trees do not grow in this country; but you know that all trees spring from seeds much smaller than themselves. The Saviour meant to show by this parable, that His religion, from very small beginnings, would spread all over the world.

* "Our Lord's words on this occasion," says Dr. Campbell, "are to be interpreted by popular use; and that there was a species of mustard, (*sinapis*), or, at least, what the orientals comprehended under that name, which rose to the size of a tree, appears from the writings of the rabbies, men who will not be suspected of partiality when their testimony happens to favour the writers of the New Testament."

One purpose for which the Saviour came on earth was to make known the gospel to men. Gospel means good news; and when "the gospel" is mentioned in the Bible, it means all the information which is necessary for sinners, to make them acquainted with the way by which they may be saved from everlasting misery. They deserve to go to hell; and certainly it is the best news they can possibly hear, that there is a way by which they may escape hell, and enter heaven.

The way of salvation which the Saviour came to make known was not new. Many good people had gone to heaven before that time, and none of them had reached that happy place in any other way. Adam and Eve had no sooner become sinners, by eating of the forbidden fruit, than God gave them the promise of a Saviour, Gen. iii. 15. Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and many other good men, whose names you have read of, received from God promises of the same kind. And after the Jews were settled in Canaan, all the sacrifices which were offered at the temple of Jerusalem, and all the worship carried on there, were intended to explain to them, and help them to keep in mind, the coming and the death of Christ. But though the Jews possessed all these advantages for learning the way of salvation, yet there were very many of them who did not understand it. Most of them were ungrateful to that God who had done such wonderful things for them; and at the time when the Saviour came, though their public worship was still continued, there were scarcely any truly religious people among them.

They had not forgot that there was a Saviour to come; but they expected him to be a great king, who should subdue all their enemies, and reign with great grandeur in the land of Canaan. As this was what they wished, they were disappointed when they saw Jesus, whose mother was a poor woman, and who was so poor himself that he had not where to lay his head. Very few of them believed that he really was the Saviour who had been promised; and almost all those

who were rich and great, hated and despised both him and those who followed him. After treating him cruelly while he lived, they at last nailed him to the cross, and there he died. He rose again from the dead, but he did not remain long upon earth; he returned to heaven. Those disciples whom he left behind were few; and the apostles, those men whom he had particularly appointed to preach the gospel, were poor and unlearned, some of them fishermen. It seemed, therefore, very unlikely that the gospel should be much attended to, even in Canaan. It was less likely that it should be carried into other nations, for they did not understand the language spoken in Canaan; and they were all worshippers of idols, and had no desire for a new religion. Besides, all men naturally dislike the gospel; they love sin, and it is not pleasant to them to hear that God is displeased with it.

But the gospel was God's own word, and his power was able to make it spread, though so many things seemed to stand in the way. When the very first sermon was preached in Jerusalem, after the Saviour had gone into heaven, there were three thousand persons who believed in him, Acts ii. 41. And if you read the Acts of the Apostles, you will find, that though those who believed the gospel were often most cruelly treated, yet great numbers did believe it, not only in Canaan, but in every part of the world that was then known. See particularly Acts iv. 4; v. 14; viii. 6; xiii. xiv. xvi., etc.

The gospel has continued to be preached in the world ever since that time, and there have always been some who believed it. Wicked men have done a great deal to prevent it from spreading; but it is remarkable, that it has sometimes spread the most, when their rage and cruelty have been the greatest. At the present time, it is preached in a greater number of places than it ever was before; and we believe that it shall soon be known in every country upon earth.

My youthful reader, I hope you hear the gospel preached every sabbath day ; but let me ask you, Have you believed it? Perhaps you scarcely know how to answer the question. You have always been accustomed to go regularly to a place of worship ; you know that your kind minister desires to do you good ; and when you see how earnest he is, in entreating the young to seek the Lord, you cannot but listen with attention. When you hear him describe the sufferings of Christ, and talk of the greatness of his love in coming from heaven to save you, you are sometimes so much affected, that you cannot forbear weeping. When you hear of the happiness of heaven, you wish that it may be yours ; and when you are told of the misery of hell, you determine to flee from the wrath to come. If you have such feelings, it is well, and your minister would be glad if he knew it ; but, my dear young friend, many others have felt in this way, who yet never really believed the gospel.

Now attend a little to the parable of the leaven, which is intended to show what effect the gospel has upon those who do believe it. Some who read this may never have seen bread made with leaven. Leaven is made of flour and water, mixed into a paste, and kept till it is sour. When used in the making of bread, it answers much the same purpose as yeast ; only it gives the bread rather a sour taste. A small piece of leaven is sufficient to make a large loaf. After it is put among the flour or meal, it must stand for some time before the bread is kneaded and put into the oven ; but it will then be found to have spread through every part of it.

When the gospel is really believed, it is said to "enter into the heart." It is not enough merely to believe that there once was a person in the world called Jesus, as if it were something that did not at all concern you. In the same way, you may sometimes believe any news that you hear ; but if it is what you have nothing to do with, you are neither glad nor sorry ; perhaps you presently forget it. But if a person told you that the

house was on fire, and you believed him, would you not be afraid? If you believed a friend who promised to give you a handsome present, would you not be glad, and at the same time grateful to him? I am sure you would; and if you really believe that God is angry with you, you will be afraid and unhappy; if you believe that Jesus Christ died to save you from the just anger of God, you will rejoice, and at the same time, you will be thankful to him for doing so. If you believe that sin is exceedingly hateful and displeasing to God, you will certainly desire to avoid it. .

These feelings, that I have now described, will not merely come into your minds occasionally; they will abide there. Like the leaven in the meal, they will spread through your heart, and your conduct too. You will not only do some duties, which happen to suit your inclination; but you will attend even to those which are most unpleasant in themselves. You will not only avoid some sins, which might displease your parents; but you will be afraid and unwilling to do wrong, even when no one can see you. In short, when the gospel is believed, it makes so complete a change, both on the heart and the conduct, that the Bible calls it being "born again," getting a "new heart."

Does any one of my readers say, "Oh! I wish I had a new heart! But how can a young child like me understand and believe the gospel?" My dear child, the Spirit of God can teach the youngest and the most ignorant, and make them "wise unto salvation." God giveth the Holy Spirit to those that ask him. He has given a promise that may encourage even you: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you:." see Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27. Whatever he has promised to give, you are permitted to ask in prayer, for the sake of Christ; and if you are at a loss what to say, you will find a prayer in Psa. li. 10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me."



THE PARABLE OF THE TREASURE.

MATTHEW XIII. 44.

THIS parable, as well as several others, begins by saying, "The kingdom of heaven is like," etc. These words, "the kingdom of heaven," when used in the Bible, often mean not only heaven itself, but the kingdom of Christ in this world. "The kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations," *Psa. xxii. 28.* "He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" *Dan. iv. 35.* But though this is the case, yet by nature men hate to submit to the Almighty. "Therefore they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" *Job xxi. 14, 15.*

Satan, who first persuaded Eve to disobey God, is called the god and the prince of this world, *John xii. 31*; *2 Cor. iv. 4*; *Eph. ii. 2*; because the men of this world willingly serve and obey him. Disobedience to God is called sin, and "the wages of sin is death," *Rom. vi. 23.* All have sinned, so that all are condemned to die, and to depart into that everlasting fire, which was at first prepared for the devil and his angels. But Jesus Christ came, "that he might destroy the works of the devil," *1 John iii. 8*; "that through death he might destroy

him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," Heb. ii. 14. For this he lived and died on earth; for this he now lives and reigns in heaven. The number of those who honour and obey him, as their King, is continually increasing; and we read in the Bible, that there is a time coming, when his kingdom shall fill the earth, Psa. lxxii. 8; Dan. ii. 44. Now, it seems to have been the Saviour's intention, in the various parables contained in Matt. xiii., not only to explain how this should be brought about, but also what kind of kingdom it really was to be. This was the more necessary, on account of those mistaken notions about it, already mentioned.*

You have read, perhaps, of more than one great man, who wished to become a king; or, if he was a king already, he wished to make his kingdom larger, to have a greater number of people under his command. For this purpose he employed soldiers to fight; he went into the country which he desired to govern, and tried to force all the inhabitants to submit to him; nay, sometimes he killed or imprisoned the king who had been reigning before. If he could succeed in all this, then he obtained the kingdom he desired; and though the people might like their old king best, they were obliged to obey the new one. If they refused, or rebelled, his soldiers or officers would soon be sent to punish them. But nothing at all like this was to take place in the kingdom of Christ. All that he desired his servants to do, was to make known the gospel; the good news of what Jesus had done, in order to reconcile rebellious sinners to God. This was the only way in which they were to be brought under his authority; when they believed this gospel, they would at once submit to him in their hearts. It is the love and obedience of the heart which he seeks; and it would give him no satisfaction, though the whole world were forced to call him their king, if they did not do it willingly. His throne is not on earth, but in heaven; and though his glory is greater

* See page 26.

than that of the mightiest earthly monarch, it is not seen by the men of the world. Let me just further observe, that children need not be afraid to come near so glorious a King, or think that they have no concern in the affairs of his kingdom. In Isa. xl. 10, it is said of Christ, "Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him." But it is immediately added, verse 11, "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." And the only time that Jesus publicly appeared as a king when he was on earth, there were many children around him. These children cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David;" and when some proud persons wished the Saviour to reprove them, he replied, "Have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" Matt. xxi. 1—16.

We have spoken of the way in which men obtain a kingdom. The inhabitants of a whole country may all at once be compelled to obey a new king; and he may go with great pomp and grandeur to take possession of his new dominion. But when the gospel is published, one person here and another person there become the subjects of King Jesus. And though we have reason to think, that many in different places are every day leaving the kingdom of Satan, yet they do it silently and secretly, unknown and unnoticed by those around them. Thus when Christ was demanded by the Pharisees, "when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation," that is, not with outward show: "neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you," Luke xvii. 20, 21. The altered conduct of Christ's subjects will soon show what king they obey; and if they are asked, they must not be ashamed to tell, Matt. x. 32, 33. But the moment when they began to obey him is known only to himself, and there was no outward bustle or show to mark the

change. This seems to be particularly taught in the parables of the hidden treasure, and the pearl of great price. The man who found the treasure, does not appear to have been seeking it, or to have known that there was such a treasure. To speak after the manner of men, it was by accident that he found it; and, instead of making a great noise about it, he hid it again, lest any one should take it from him.

The treasure seems intended to mean the salvation of Christ, that is, deliverance from sin and from misery by him. This may well be called a treasure, for those who obtain it shall never want any good thing. They have "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" for them, 1 Pet. i. 4. And though they may not immediately go to this inheritance, they are rich and happy even while they remain on earth. They may have little of this world's goods to call their own; but their God shall supply all their need "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus," Phil. iv. 19. Their Father in heaven tells them to be careful for nothing: but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let their requests be made known unto him, Phil. iv. 6. In Christ all fulness dwells, and they are complete in him, Col. i. 19; ii. 9, 10. There are many rich men in the world, who yet are not contented or satisfied. But the treasure which Jesus spoke of, satisfies every wish and desire of the mind, John iv. 13, 14. There are many things which cannot be bought for money. Solomon says, that "if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned," Song viii. 7. Now, if a man had all the riches in the world, what a poor creature would he be if he had not a friend, or one person to be kind to him! But those who find the gospel treasure, find a Friend who loveth at all times, and a Brother who is born for adversity, Prov. xvii. 17. They have a Father who is too wise ever to be mistaken, who always keeps his promise, and whose love can never come to an end.

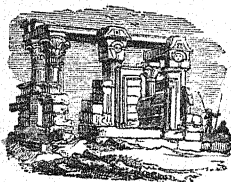
What comfort could thousands of gold and silver give to one who is full of pain, and worn with sickness, having no prospect of recovery, but "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries?" But he who finds the treasure of which we are speaking, can say with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases," *Psa. ciii. 2, 3.* Sin is often compared to a disease; because it prevents the soul from enjoying any real comfort, and entirely unfits it for serving God. But Jesus came into the world to be a Physician for souls, *Matt. ix. 12, 13.* And when he has healed the soul, the sinner can say, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," *Phil. iv. 11.* "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day," *2 Cor. iv. 16.* While suffering the severest pain, he feels assured that it is his Father's hand which afflicts him, and that he will not continue the affliction a moment longer than is good for him. He knows, that if the sickness should be unto death, it will only bring him sooner to the place where his principal treasure is laid up, where "the inhabitant saith not, I am sick;" where there is "no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

Is any one of my readers ready to say, "This is a treasure indeed; can you tell me where it is to be found?" Yes, my dear young friend, you have often been in the field where it is hid: I hope you are in it every day. The field is the Bible: and oh, how delightful it is to think that the poorest child in Britain may now obtain a Bible! Happy, indeed, is that boy or girl, to whom it can be said, as it was to Timothy of old, "From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." But as we may suppose that many persons had walked through the field where the treasure lay, without finding it; so very many

read the Bible without becoming "rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him." Such people read the Scriptures without considering that they contain a treasure; and therefore, while they are reading, they do not look for it. But some who have continued to read in this unprofitable manner for years, are at length brought to see that the word of the Lord is "more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honey-comb," *Psa. xix. 10.* God is pleased to open their understanding, that they may understand the Scriptures, *Luke xxiv. 45.* They are surprised to find such riches, where they never before saw any thing to desire. Every word is now precious to them, because they are taught to believe every word is spoken by Him who cannot lie. "They rejoice even as one that findeth great spoil." So great is their joy, that they would willingly part with all they have besides. They are convinced that "one thing is needful;" and they choose that good part which shall not be taken away from them, *Luke x. 42.* They cannot do any thing to buy or deserve the treasure. At the same time they are required to give up every sin, and even some pleasures which they did not before think sinful; but all this they cheerfully do, because they are satisfied and happy with their new enjoyments, and because they love Him who has made them so happy. They feel assured that it would profit them nothing if they were to gain the whole world, and lose their own souls, *Mark viii. 36, 37;* therefore they wish to keep from every thing that would interfere with their salvation, or hinder them in their course toward the full possession of their inheritance. Worldly people around them wonder at their conduct, because they do not understand the reason of it; just as we may suppose, that those who knew nothing of the treasure which the man had found would be surprised at his selling all his old possessions in order to buy one field. Their surprise would come to an end when they learned what the field contained; and the gay and

thoughtless would soon cease their wondering at what they call "the unnecessary strictness" of Christians, if they once discovered for themselves the "durable riches" of the Divine word.

You see, then, my dear children, what encouragement you have to be diligent and attentive in reading the Scriptures, and in hearing the gospel. The treasure which is offered to you is not for one person only; for God is rich unto all that call upon him, Rom. x. 12 "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened," Matt. vii. 7, 8; see also Prov. ii. 3—5; iii. 13—18. But let me also remind you, that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. ii. 14. These things are hid from the wise and prudent, who think that by their wisdom and prudence they can find them; but God revealeth them unto babes, Matt. xi. 25, 26. "He giveth his Holy Spirit to them that ask him." His language to you is, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal," Matt. vi. 19, 20, 33.





THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL.

MATTHEW XIII. 45, 46.

A PEARL, as many of my youthful readers know, is a white shining thing, generally of a round shape, and is found in some kinds of shell-fish, particularly those which are called pearl-oysters. Pearls are used and greatly admired as ornaments. Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, had a pearl valued at £80,000 sterling; and Philip II., king of Spain, had one as large as a pigeon's egg, valued at 144,000 ducats. I mention these, in order to explain the conduct of the merchant-man who was seeking goodly pearls. Many of those which he had already found perhaps were small, and of little value. It is but seldom that very large ones are to be met with, and that is the reason why these are so dear. But if a man were to find only one such as those described above, it would make his fortune of itself, if he could sell it. Thus the merchant-man was glad to obtain one pearl of great price, though it cost him all that he had.

There is one thing which all the men, and women, and children in the world are constantly seeking, and that is happiness. Almost every one seeks it in a different way; but each one thinks that he would be very happy, if he could only obtain that particular thing which he desires the most. The merchant-man

probably travelled many miles, and endured much trouble and fatigue, while he was seeking goodly pearls. And there is scarcely any labour or difficulty which men will not undergo, in order to be happy. Thus Solomon says, "All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing," Eccl. i. 8. And because there is not one of all the things, which men strive after in this world, that can really make them happy, he also says, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?" Eccl. i. 2, 3. The God of salvation daily loadeth us with benefits; every day he gives us good things for this life, more than we can number; and these may be compared to goodly pearls; but yet they are not sufficient to make the soul happy.

What, then, is meant by that one pearl of great price which the merchant-man found? It is generally understood to mean the Lord Jesus Christ himself. I have already mentioned the weight and the price of several very fine pearls; but who can describe the glory, and beauty, and excellence of the Son of God? If we wish to know any thing of him, we must follow his own direction: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me," John v. 39. They testify, that is, they solemnly declare, that, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made," John i. 1, 3. "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace," Isa. ix. 6. "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," Heb. vii. 25. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth, Matt. xxviii. 18. And he manages and orders every thing, so as to make his

people safe and happy. He is "a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother;" and even the fondness of a mother for the infant at her breast, is not equal to his unchangeable love, Isa. xlix. 15, 16. He never for one moment forgets those whom he loves; and they cannot have one sorrowful or anxious thought that he does not know. He loved them, and gave himself for them. His love was stronger than death when he hung upon the cross; and he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He is "not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." "For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted," Heb. iv. 15; ii. 18.

If we read the history of his life on earth, we shall find that his pity and his tenderness were always remarkable. Look at his kindness to the widow of Nain, and to the woman who had "an issue of blood," Luke vii. 11—15; Matt. ix. 20—22. Think how he had compassion on those who had nothing to eat, and how plentifully he supplied their wants; and observe, there were many children among those whom he thus relieved, Matt. xiv. 14—21. Indeed, children always met with particular kindness from him. "He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them," Mark x. 16. Recollect, too, how he "went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease among the people," Matt. ix. 35—38. Wherever he went, he brought health and joy to those who were oppressed with disease and grief. See him weeping at the sight of the tears of others, John xi. 33, 35; and hear him pray for those who nailed him to the cross. Consider how he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself; "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously," 1 Pet. ii. 23.

What gracious promises did he make to his disciples before he left the world! John xiii.—xvii. And let it be remembered, that he never speaks any thing but the truth. You may meet with people who speak to you very kindly, while, after all, they are your greatest enemies; or they may promise to do many things for you, which they cannot perform. But it is not so with the blessed Saviour. He makes the kindest promises to those who deserve nothing but his anger; and he never yet disappointed any that believed him. He is now seated at the right hand of God, in glory so bright, that our eyes could not bear to look at him: yet it is his great delight to save sinners from hell, and to make them fit for dwelling in his presence. He is preparing a place for them, and he will come again and receive them unto himself. It is his presence that makes heaven such a happy place; and it will be the highest enjoyment of his people to love and admire him through all eternity. "He is the chiefest among ten thousand; yea, he is altogether lovely."

But what does it mean to find this precious pearl? The Saviour freely offers himself to all who hear the gospel. He says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. But many who hear these things, see no form nor comeliness in him that they should desire him, Isa. liii. 2: just as we may suppose that a person, who did not know the value of pearls, would throw the finest away, thinking them to be useless. But if one who knew better were to take up what was thus thrown down, point out the shining treasure concealed within the rough shell, and mention the riches which it might procure, how differently would it then be looked upon! how eagerly desired! And such a change as this takes place in the mind of every one who finds the pearl of great price. The Spirit of God convinces him that he needs a Saviour, and that Jesus is exactly the Saviour suitable for him. Then the sinner rejoices to believe all that the Bible declares of the excellence of Christ; and he soon finds

that it is all true. For, believing in Christ, he obtains rest to his soul, peace with God, and a good hope of everlasting life. He is called upon to give up his own will; he must "deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ," Mark viii. 34. But he is willing to do this, because he thus judges, "that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again," 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. The believer in Christ must give up vain and sinful amusements; but, like Moses, he chooses "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season: esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he has respect unto the recompence of the reward," Heb. xi. 25, 26. He must give up the favour and friendship of the ungodly; for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God," James iv. 4. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Tim. iii. 12. But the believer remembers the word that Jesus said unto his disciples: "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you." "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," John xv. 20; xvi. 33. And he patiently waits for the fulfilment of that promise, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven," Matt. x. 32.

Thus it is that the kingdom of heaven resembles "a merchant-man seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." That which chiefly distinguishes the men of Christ's kingdom from the men of the world is, their love to Him, and their readiness to part with every thing for his sake. This will always appear in their conduct. There must ever be this

remarkable difference between them and the subjects of Satan's kingdom. For, as the Saviour himself said, "He that is not with me is against me. No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon," Matt. xii. 30; vi. 24. Think not, my dear readers, that these are hard sayings, and that you cannot hear them. "Love will make obedience sweet." All who come to Christ find that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light, Matt. xi. 30. "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for Christ's name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life," Matt. xix. 29.





THE PARABLE OF THE NET CAST INTO THE SEA.

MATTHEW XIII. 47—50.

IN the beginning of the chapter which contains this parable, we are told, that Jesus sat in a ship, and spoke to a great crowd of people who stood on the sea-shore. At ver. 36, it is mentioned that he "sent the multitude away, and went into the house." There his disciples came unto him, and after explaining the parable of the tares in the field, he went on to speak some other parables, while they were thus privately together. It is probable that this house was not very far from the sea; and perhaps many fishing-boats were in sight. But however this might be, we know that several of our Lord's disciples had been fishermen, and were well acquainted with the use of nets, and the management of fish after they were caught, Mark i. 16—20. It was therefore a most simple and suitable way of explaining to the disciples what he meant to teach concerning the

kingdom of heaven, to compare it to casting a net into the sea. When we think of Jesus so kindly and pleasantly instructing his followers, we are ready to say, Blessed were those who saw the Saviour, and heard the sound of his voice. But let us remember his own words, spoken at another time: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed," John xx. 29: see also Luke xi. 27, 28.

When a net is cast into the sea, it often happens that many different sorts of fish are caught in it. The fishermen do not know what the net contains, till they have drawn it to shore. They then carefully gather into their baskets all the good and useful fish; at the same time throwing away all those which are bad. If any of my readers ever walked on the sea-shore, near to a place where there were many fishermen, they may have seen fish, which had thus been thrown away, scattered about on the sand.

I have already said that the servants of Christ are to enlarge his kingdom, by making known the gospel: and the gospel is chiefly made known by preaching it. The gospel is good news to all descriptions of people, and all are equally welcome to hear it. At the hour of public worship, the doors of churches and chapels are set open, and every one who chooses to enter is readily admitted. But the apostles, and other disciples of Christ, did not confine their preaching to any particular place or time. Wherever they could find persons to listen to them, there they made known "the unsearchable riches of Christ;" just as fishermen will cast their net, where they think there is the greatest number of fishes. Thus, when a multitude of people ran together to see the lame man whom Peter and John had healed, Peter immediately took the opportunity of preaching to them, Acts iii. 11-26. We find the apostles teaching in the temple early in the morning, having just been delivered from prison by the angel of the Lord, Acts v. 19-21. Peter and

John preached the gospel in many villages, while travelling through Samaria to Jerusalem, Acts viii. 25; and, near the town of Philippi, Paul preached by a river side, Acts xvi. 12, 13. In acting thus, the apostles obeyed the directions which the Lord had given them. In one of his parables he had said, "Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage," Matt. xxii. 9. In Luke xiv. 21—23, there is a still more particular description given of the various people who should be invited to partake of the gospel feast.

Besides preaching, there is now another way in which the gospel is very often made known, and that is, by teaching in Sunday schools. Some of you, my youthful readers, may remember a time when there was no Sunday school in your neighbourhood. And perhaps you remember, too, when one or two persons came and called at the house where you live, and at every house near it, in order to ask whether the children had any religious instruction or not. These persons talked kindly to you and to your parents, and invited you to attend a school which they meant to open on the sabbath. They did not inquire for all the good children, and say that they would have no scholars but them. No, they were anxious to have as many as they could properly manage; and every child that came to the school was gladly received, and carefully taught the way of salvation. Now, this was casting the gospel-net. I hope that some children, who were really bad when they entered the school, have now, by the blessing of God on his own word, become good. But no doubt there are still both bad and good children to be found in the school. Your teachers are often much grieved and displeased with the bad scholars; yet they do not send them away. They patiently continue to instruct them; and rejoice in being able to direct them to Him who is the Saviour of sinners. Nor is it their teachers only who thus bear with them; Jesus himself looks on them from his heavenly throne,

and is pleased with the endeavours of those who would lead them to him. He is long-suffering towards them, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," 2 Pet. iii. 9. He is as full of pity now, as he was when "he beheld Jerusalem, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes," Luke xix. 41, 42. These things are not yet hid from the eyes of any child who attends a Sunday school. Oh, then, "seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," Isa. lv. 6, 7.

It is delightful to dwell upon the love of Christ to sinners, and on the privilege they enjoy in hearing of that love. But we must turn to a very different scene, described in ver. 49, 50. It is always painful for friends to be separated; and children are generally sorry to part with their school-fellows, even though, while they were together, they did not always agree. But at the end of the world, a separation will take place, which will be eternal. And those who have sat together on the same seats to receive instruction from the same voice, shall be divided from one another. While they were on earth, there was joy in heaven among the angels of God, over one sinner that repented. But then, these very angels shall be employed to "sever the wicked from among the just." And this is not all that the angels will have to do with the wicked. They shall cast them into that place, so often and so fearfully described in Scripture, as "the furnace of fire; where shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." There "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," Mark ix. 44. Let every child think of these solemn questions: "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" Isa. xxxiii. 14.

I have spoken of those Sunday scholars, who are so wicked that they grieve and displease their teachers. But do not think, my dear children, that you are in no danger of hell fire, because you behave well at school, and are generally called good children. Some of your companions may be very naughty; others may not appear to be quite so bad; and it may really be the case that your conduct is still better than theirs. But all will at last be found, either among the wicked or among the just. And the angels can make no mistake; for they will act under the direction of Him who searcheth the hearts, and trieth the reins of the children of men. He is present now in the assemblies of his people; and he has described some, who come as his people come, and they sit as his people, and they hear the words of his servant, "but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness," *Ezek. xxxiii. 31.* It is to be feared that in every school, and in every place of worship, there are many persons of this description. Fellow creatures cannot, at present, distinguish them from "the true worshippers, who worship the Father in spirit and in truth;" but their wickedness will be openly declared, "in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." In *Prov. v. 11—14*, we read the miserable end of one, who seems to have attended the instructions of religious teachers, and mingled with the congregation of the righteous. How suitable, then, and how necessary is it, for all who sit under the sound of the gospel, to say, with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" *Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24.*





“He took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.”

THE PARABLE OF THE KING AND HIS TWO SERVANTS.

MATTHEW XVIII. 23—35.

OUR Saviour had been telling his disciples, that if any of them did wrong to another, if he confessed his fault, and was sorry for it, the one whom he had offended was to forgive him. One of them, named Peter, asked how often he should forgive another who offended him. The Saviour told him, that if his brother were to offend him even hundreds of times, he was to forgive him if he desired it. And this parable was spoken, on purpose to show Peter that it was a reasonable duty which was thus required of him.

This king had given money to his servants, and he wished to know what use they had made of it. The money was not their own, but they were to use it for such purposes as the king ordered them. And you

know, God is the King of heaven and earth, and all the people in the world are under his authority. He gave them every thing they have; and they should use every thing they have in the way that he commands them. At the day of judgment, he will call all men to account for the way in which they have used what he had given them. My youthful reader, if God were now to call you to account, how do you think you should stand before him? Remember, you *will* have to answer for all the advantages you have.

The king soon found that one of his servants had behaved very ill. He had spent, improperly, ten thousand talents of the king's money. This was a very large sum indeed; equal, I believe, to two millions sterling of our money. This may be intended to teach us what very great sinners we are. Did you ever consider how often you have sinned against God? How often have you played on his holy day, and behaved irreverently in his house! How many times have you disobeyed your parents, and perhaps tried to hide your fault by telling a lie! Your sins are so many, that you could not count them if you were to try. You have been told that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; and that he invites you to come to him, and be saved. Now, if you have not come to him, this is the worst of all your sins. God has said, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

The servant was not able to pay his debt; and the king commanded him, and his wife, and his children to be sold, and all that he had. I am sure my readers would have pitied these poor people, expecting to have every thing taken from them, and to be sold into a state of bondage. But all this is to teach us what a miserable state we are in, as sinners against God. The law of God requires perfect obedience, for God says, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. Though we had only committed one sin, we should

deserve to be punished ; how much more, when we have committed so many ! We are like the servant who had nothing to pay.

He begged his master to have patience with him, and he would pay him all. And perhaps you, my young friend, think that if God will have patience with you, and let you live a while longer in the world, you will begin to be very religious, and do all that he commands you ; and you think that then surely he will not punish you. But even if you could do so, that would not make up for all your past sins ; besides, how do you think you could keep yourself from sin in time to come, any more than you have already done ?

The king knew that the servant would never be able to pay so large a sum, but he freely forgave him ; that is, he promised never to seek payment of that money again. But the kindness that God has shown to sinners is even greater than this. He has sent his own dearly beloved Son into the world, on purpose to pay the debt which they owed ; or, in other words, to endure the punishment that they deserved. In all that Jesus Christ suffered, while he lived on earth, and when he died upon the cross, he was paying that debt which sinners could never have paid. And if you go to God, confessing that you can deserve nothing but everlasting misery, and trusting in Jesus Christ alone, as having suffered in your place, God will forgive all your sins. He will take you for his own child, and treat you as if you had never offended him.

But how did this king's servant behave, after meeting with such kindness from his master ? He had no sooner left the king's presence, than he saw a fellow servant who owed him a hundred pence. This was a very small sum, compared with what his own debt had been. In a rude and angry manner he took his fellow servant by the throat, and ordered him to make immediate payment. His fellow servant did not strike him, or speak angrily in return, but he humbly fell down at his feet, and said, " Have patience with me, and I

will pay thee all." These were the very same words which he had used himself, only a little while before; but, instead of feeling pity and showing kindness, as the king had done to him, he went and put his fellow servant in prison.

My young readers, I dare say that you think this was a very cruel, ungrateful servant; but are you sure that you yourselves are not as much to blame? God has had patience with you for years, though you have been constantly sinning against him; and have not you often been impatient, and got into a passion with some of your play-fellows, if they have only just said something that did not please you? God is willing to forgive you for all you have done; but when any one has once offended you, have you not remembered it long after, and been glad when you had an opportunity of showing how much you disliked him? I do not think that servant could feel happy after he used his fellow servant so cruelly; and I am sure you are not happy when you are speaking angry words, or in any way returning evil to one that has displeased you.

Perhaps the servant thought that his master would never know of his conduct; but it was not long before the other servants informed him. How ashamed he must have felt when the king sent for him, and said, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me; shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?" God does not need that any one should tell him what you do, for he knows all things; he even sees the anger and ill-will that are in your hearts, when you dare not show them. And the time will soon come when you must appear in his presence, to answer for all your conduct.

It is said that the king delivered the servant "to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him;" and it is added, "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." Then

remember, that if you are spiteful and revengeful while you live, when you die you must go to dwell in that place where there will be nothing but hatred, and rage, and misery, to all eternity.

In the Lord's prayer we say, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;" and, in Matt. vi. 14, 15, it is said, "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

My dear children, it is natural to you to return "evil for evil;" nay, I fear there are some of you who strike your own brothers and sisters, or speak harshly to them, even when they have done nothing at all to provoke you. But if you really believed that you are as great sinners as the Bible says you are, you would be ready to think every one else better than yourselves; and when you considered, that, instead of sending you to hell, God had given his own dear Son to die for you, you would feel ashamed to be angry for any little affront you might meet with. It is only by believing what God has told you about Jesus Christ, and trusting in him as your Saviour, that you can be delivered from an unforgiving spirit, and from every thing else that is sinful. If you love him, you will pray to God to give you "the same mind" that was in Him, who was "meek and lowly in heart;" and who even prayed for his murderers, after they had nailed him to the cross, when he said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," Luke xxiii. 34.





THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN WHO DIED SUDDENLY.

LUKE XII. 16—21.

If my young friends will read from the 13th verse of the chapter which contains this parable, they will better understand what our Lord intended to teach us from it. He had been discoursing on a very solemn subject; and the man who could interrupt him at such a time, to speak about his temporal affairs, showed that his mind was far too much engaged with worldly things. It also appeared that he coveted, that is, desired to have, some part of what was possessed by his brother. All the Saviour's hearers must have known that the tenth commandment says, "Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbour's." They did not need to be informed that covetousness was sinful; but our Lord spoke this parable, to show them that it was foolish too.

The most covetous person could scarcely have desired more than this rich man had obtained. The only

thing that troubled him, was the difficulty of finding room to contain the abundance of his goods. But he resolved to pull down his barns, and build them larger; and he expected that then he should be perfectly happy, as he should have nothing to do, but to "eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" God called him a fool; he had made abundance of provision for his comfort in this world, where he was not to remain for another day: but as to that world where he was to live through everlasting ages, he had secured to himself nothing but misery.

Let children think of this parable, when they feel disposed to wish for gayer clothes, nicer food, or a greater variety of amusements than they at present possess. Supposing you could obtain all the things that you desire, and supposing that they afforded you all the enjoyment you expect from them, how long could you keep them? There is a night or a day coming, in which God shall say to each of you, "Thy soul is required of thee." And how great will then be your dismay, if the only things which you have loved and enjoyed, are those which you must part with for ever!

But is there no brighter prospect than this, that I can set before you? Is there nothing which you may seek and obtain, of which even death cannot deprive you? Yes, my dear children, there is; there is "an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away," 1 Pet. i. 4: there is an "eternal weight of glory," 2 Cor. iv. 17; there is fulness of joy in the presence of God; and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore, Psa. xvi. 11. And may children hope to obtain such high and glorious blessings? Yes; for Jesus says, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Many persons toil all their lives for riches, without

ever obtaining them ; but of the heavenly riches Jesus says, "He that asketh, receiveth ; and he that seeketh, findeth ; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." He commends Mary, because she "hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

And let not children think, that those who "lay up for themselves treasures in heaven," have no pleasure in the enjoyments of earth. On the contrary, they taste a sweetness in them, which others know nothing of. They receive every comfort as from the hand of their Father in heaven, and as a proof of his love to them. They know that he has forgiven all their sins, and is no more angry with them ; so that they have no fears of future punishment, to disturb them in their enjoyment of friends or of wealth. Neither is their present peace interrupted by anxious cares as to what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or wherewithal they shall be clothed, for the time to come. Their Father knoweth that they have need of these things ; and they are assured, that He who feeds the ravens, and clothes the lilies, is able to supply all their wants. Even if they should be for a time in sickness or poverty, they are not deprived of happiness ; for "they know that all things work together for good to them that love God : " and they know, too, that after these "light afflictions, which are but for a moment," they shall enjoy the "rest" which "remaineth for the people of God." "Happy is that people that is in such a case ; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord."



THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND THE
PORTER.

JOHN X. 1—18.

PART I.

THERE are few things more pleasant to behold, or which children are more fond of looking at, than a flock of sheep with their shepherd. Such of my readers as live in a town, may never have seen many sheep, except when driven along the road, dusty and weary, perhaps going to be slaughtered. There is certainly little pleasure in seeing the poor animals in this state. But what child would not be delighted, to see a number of sheep in their own quiet fields, white and clean, feeding, or lying down upon the green soft grass? And who would not admire the watchful shepherd, gathering them together in the evening, gently leading them to the fold, and carefully shutting them into it?

The Saviour, who "knew what was in man," kindly desired to make his instructions pleasant and easily understood. He intended that even little children should know and love his sayings. And we find that most of his parables are particularly suited to the understanding of young persons. The words "Verily, verily," with which this parable begins, were often used by him when he had anything of peculiar importance to say. He is called "the faithful Witness," Rev. i. 5; what he spoke is "the truth," John xviii. 37. He not only abhorred lying, and like all good people, meant to say only what was true; but as he is infinitely wise, and knows all things, it is impossible for him to be mistaken. Neither did he ever utter any thing trifling or useless; so that not to believe any saying of his, is exceedingly sinful. Still the words, "Verily, verily," (that is, Certainly, certainly,) seem to call for special attention; and to inform us, that what was about to be spoken

THE SHEPHERD GOING BEFORE THE SHEEP



was more than commonly solemn. Let us remember this, while we attend to the parable before us.

The fold is a place for the sheep to rest in through the night, or at any other time when they are not in the fields. A fold is always enclosed with a wall, or some kind of fence; and in a country like Judea, where wild beasts are common, it would be necessary that the wall should be high, and the door well fastened. If any one were seen trying to climb over the wall, it would certainly be supposed that he was a thief; for the shepherd would be able to open the door, and would not be afraid to be seen doing so. If a person had been left to watch by the door, he would readily open it for the shepherd, and would have no fear in letting him enter.

The 3rd and 4th verses cannot be well understood, without knowing something of the customs of eastern nations. Some of my readers may have been told, that in those countries the shepherds have a name for every sheep in their flocks; that the sheep know the shepherd's voice, and move at his call; and that instead of driving them before him, as in this country, he walks before them, and they follow him. See picture on p. 57. But if a thief or any other stranger were to call them, they would be afraid, and would run from him if they could. Those persons who heard this parable spoken by Christ, did not understand what he meant by it. He kindly explained it to them; and we should rejoice that we can read his own explanation of it in his own words.

He again calls for attention by the words "Verily, verily;" and certainly what he was about to utter is of unspeakable importance. If we know and believe what he then taught, we are safe and blessed for ever: if we disbelieve these truths, or are ignorant of them, we must be miserable, though we should have all the learning in the world besides. The sheep are intended to mean the people of Christ: those who believe and obey his words. They are often in the Bible called by this name: see

Psa. lxxiv. 1 ; lxxviii. 52 ; lxxix. 13. And in many things the people of Christ, or Christians as they are called, greatly resemble sheep. A sheep is a cleanly, harmless, gentle, and quiet animal. And Christians are to "be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation," Phil. ii. 15. They are also commanded to put away all "bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, with all malice," Eph. iv. 31 ; and to possess "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," 1 Pet. iii. 4. They are called upon to learn of Christ, who was meek and lowly in heart, Matt. xi. 29 ; to let the same mind be in them, which was also in him ; and of him it was said that he should "not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street," Isa. xlii. 2. "He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth," Isa. liii. 7. Sheep are also weak and helpless ; and there are many animals, stronger and fiercer than themselves, which would destroy them if they could. The Saviour alludes to this in ver. 12 ; and we shall see that in this respect also his people resemble sheep.

Jesus says, "I am the door of the sheep." It is through the door of the fold that the shepherd enters. Though Jesus himself is the chief Shepherd, 1 Pet. v. 4 ; yet all faithful ministers who preach the truth which he taught, and watch for souls as those who shall give account, Heb. xiii. 17, are also called shepherds, or pastors, Acts xx. 28. The fold may be supposed to mean the church of God. When children hear of a church, they are apt to think only of a building made of brick or stone, and used as a place of public worship. But in Scripture the word church means a great deal more than this. When we read there of a church, we are to understand a company of Christians meeting in one place for the worship of God, and joining together to attend to all the rules which Christ has commanded to be observed. Thus we find mentioned, "The church which is at Corinth," etc., 1 Cor. i. 2 ; 1 Thess. i. 1. But when

the church is spoken of, without naming any one place in particular, it means all the people of Christ, whether on earth or in heaven, Eph. v. 32; Col. i. 18—24. Though even those who are on earth are far more numerous than any one place could contain, and though they are scattered up and down in different countries; yet, being all under the care of Christ, and all loving and trusting in him, he looks on them all as one large company, which he calls his church. Though they are very different from each other in their outward appearance, and in many other things, yet in this they are all the same—that they love Christ, and seek to please him. But we shall have more of this to say afterwards.

What, then, is meant by Christ being the door of his church? You will observe that this is twice spoken of in the parable. It is first mentioned in verse 7; and the Saviour immediately adds: "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them." All who are really pastors in the church of Christ have believed in him themselves, and preach his word in obedience to his own command. This is the only proper way to become a minister of the gospel; just as the door is the only proper way of entering a fold, or other building. But there always have been persons who pretended to preach the word of God, and were called ministers in his church, while they neither believed the truth, nor had any desire that their hearers should believe it. Such men have no right to act as pastors among Christians; even as a thief who climbed over the wall of the fold, was at once known not to be the shepherd. And as the sheep would be afraid of a stranger coming in this way, so the people of Christ, who love him, will avoid those preachers who speak contrary to his word, or who are disobedient to his commands.

In verse 9, the Saviour again says, "I am the door." It is important to consider that the door of the fold was the proper entrance, not for the shepherd only, but also

for the sheep themselves. And let the youngest children remember, that if they wish to be found in the fold we are speaking of, it is quite as needful that they should enter in by Christ, as it is for ministers who are to preach to others. In John xiv. 6, Jesus says, "I am the way: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Christ, then, is the way, or the door which leads to God. God is displeased with sinners, because they have disobeyed him; and sinners neither love God nor desire to please him. In this state, they are compared to wandering sheep, Isa. liii. 6, which are shut out from the fold. They cannot, it is true, wander to any place where God is not near them, for he is present everywhere, Psa. cxxxix. 7—12; but it makes them unhappy to think of his presence. They dislike his day, his house, and his worship: and it would be no pleasure to them to dwell in heaven, where he dwells. Now, it is only Christ who can obtain the favour of God for such wandering sinners, and bring them back to love God, and to delight in his presence. Believing in Christ, then, (that is, believing all that the Bible tells us about Christ,) is as it were going in at the door. For "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. But some child may be saying, "Yes, it is very true; I was once like a wandering sheep. I used to play on the sabbath; I never read my Bible; and I learned nothing but foolish songs and wicked words. But now I surely am in the fold of God. I read a chapter in the Bible every day; I love my Sunday school; and I have never played on the sabbath since my teacher told me how naughty it was to do so. I always learn my lessons perfectly, besides a great many hymns which I have learned without being desired; and I sometimes sing these hymns at home, or teach them to my little brother or sister. My mother says, I have become a very good child since I went to the Sunday school." Ah! my dear young friend, but you still need Jesus Christ to save you, as much as when you were running in the streets,

or playing in the fields, on the Lord's day. All this improvement in your behaviour, may lead others to think that you are now one of the flock of Christ; and they may continue to think so as long as they live. But God does not count you among that number, while you expect to please him and obtain his favour without Christ. And if you are not depending on Christ as your Saviour, you cannot feel any love to God for sending him into the world to save sinners. The apostle John says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We love him, because he first loved us," 1 John iv. 10, 19.

When a man once asked, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer given to him was, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," Acts xvi. 30, 31. And here the Saviour himself says, "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." When we say that a sheep finds pasture, we mean, that it finds plenty of grass to eat; grass being a kind of food which it likes. So when a sinner has come to God by Christ, he finds enough to fill all his wishes and desires. Every person in the world desires to be happy; but happiness is only to be found with Christ. Children especially love to be cheerful; and their childhood is happy indeed, when they come by Christ into the fold or family of God. To know that the great God is no more angry with them, but is become their Father; and that Christ is their elder Brother, gone before to prepare a place for them in their Father's house, John xiv. 2, is enough to fill them with joy. And this joy will last, after the playful days of childhood have passed away. In old age, if they shall live to see it, their joy, instead of becoming less, will be increased; for they will then have learned and experienced more of the goodness of their heavenly Father. Their flesh and their heart may fail; but God will be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever, Psa. lxxiii. 26.

In verse 10 the Saviour again speaks of those false teachers, who resemble thieves in a fold, and shows how different he himself was from them. They tried only to please and enrich themselves, while they destroyed the souls of men. He had come that men might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. Many had obtained eternal life before Christ came, by believing that God would send a Saviour into the world, according to his promise. But when he did come, he made known more abundantly what eternal life is, and also showed more clearly how sinners may obtain it. Eternal life is not merely an escape from eternal death; it is a life of unspeakable blessedness, abundant in every thing that can make the soul happy through eternity. It is to be spent in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy; and at his right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore, Psa. xvi. 11.

PART II.

I HAVE seen some children, who had been a year or two at school, that were very proud of what they knew; and if a younger brother or sister asked them the meaning of any thing in their lessons, they would be quite cross and impatient, and would hardly take the trouble to answer. How different was the conduct of the blessed Jesus! Though he knew all things, he patiently instructed the most ignorant people, and even those who were unwilling to learn. He did not tell once only, but he repeated things over and over again, in different ways, to make himself more easily understood. Well might he say, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart," Matt. xi. 29.

In the first part of this parable, he had showed the way into the church of God, by comparing himself to a door. In this second part, he calls himself a Shepherd, in order to describe his care and love toward those

who have, by faith in Him, entered in. He calls himself the "good Shepherd," because he is better and greater than any, even the best of those who have ever acted as pastors in his church. This was not the first time that Jesus had been called a Shepherd; the name was frequently given to him in the Old Testament, Gen. xlix. 24; Psal. lxxx. 1; Zech. xiii. 7, etc. Some shepherds are only hired to keep sheep which are not their own; but Christ's people are his own. "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." He bought them, and the price that he paid for them was his own life. "The wages of sin is death." Sinners deserve to die. But Christ loved them, and gave himself for them. He stood in their place, and died instead of them. The dreadful anger of God against sin fell upon him. O children! remember this when you are tempted to do wrong. Think of the beloved Son of God dying upon the cross; pouring out his blood, that sinners might be delivered from the wrath to come. Remember, it was sin that occasioned the sufferings he endured; and can you think it a trifling matter to commit even what may seem to you a small fault? Here you may see what God's displeasure is. When Jesus saw some persons weeping, while he went to be crucified, turning unto them he said, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Luke xxiii. 28, 31.

A wolf, as most of my readers know, is a wild and cruel animal, which devours sheep and lambs, and men also, if it can get them into its power. So that, to see a wolf coming towards a fold must have been very frightful. A hireling, one who was hired to watch the sheep, and who did not care for them, would flee at the sight of a wolf. If you read 1 Sam. xvii. 34—37, you will see the dangers to which shepherds and their flocks are exposed, where wild beasts abound. The sheep of Christ, also, have their cruel enemies. Their "adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seek-

ing whom he may devour," 1 Pet. v. 8. Wicked people, too, often try to hurt those who belong to Christ. And as they are not perfectly free from sin while they remain in the church below, many things may happen to tempt them to wander again from Christ. But the good Shepherd loves them too well to leave them in the time of danger. They are his own, and he considers their enemies as enemies to himself. A poor sheep is helpless, when the wolf lays hold of it; and Christians have no strength of their own, to keep their souls from evil. But their Shepherd is "mighty to save;" and they are "more than conquerors through him that loved them," Rom. viii. 37. Their weakness keeps them daily looking to him. It is not enough to enter the fold at first, by believing in him. His people delight to be always trusting in him; and he never forgets them. David sang, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me," Psa. xxiii. 1, 2, 4. And this good Shepherd takes peculiar care of the young and feeble in his church, whom he calls the lambs of his flock, Isa. xl. 11; John xxi. 15—17. He has said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And in that beautiful passage of Scripture, Matt. xviii. 1—14, which every child should love to remember, he seriously admonishes older Christians to beware of slighting the smallest of his lambs: the passage, especially from the 10th verse, is so remarkably suitable to the present subject, that I can hardly forbear quoting it at length; but I beg that all my readers may turn to it in their Bibles.

Verse 14. Though the good Shepherd has a very great number of sheep, yet he knows every particular concerning every one of them. He knows what sins they are most tempted to commit, and what sorrows

they have to distress them. To show us how constantly and how kindly he remembers them, we are taught to believe that he has all their names written upon his breast, or upon the palms of his hands: compare Exod. xxviii. 9—21, with Heb. vii. 21—28; ix. 7—14; Isa. xlix. 15, 16. The poorest and the youngest are as dear to him as the rest; and not one of them shall be lost. He says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand," John x. 27—30. At the last day, it will be seen how well he knows all his flock: for "before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left," Matt. xxv. 32, 33. While this will be a joyful time to those who have trusted their souls to his care, the prospect is very awful to others. Many, who now despise both Christ and his people, will wish, at that solemn day, that they had been found among their number. But not one goat will then find a place among the sheep.

After saying, "I know my sheep," the Saviour adds, "and am known of mine." A child may ask, "How can I know Christ, when I cannot see him?" It is true, you cannot see him; but if you believe what the Bible says, you will know enough to make you love him. When he was about to leave the world, he told his disciples, that in a little while they should see him no more; but he promised that after he was gone, the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, should come. And he was to come for the very purpose of teaching them more about the Saviour, John xiv. 16, 17, 25, 26; xv. 26; xvi. 7—14. He also said, speaking of earthly parents, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Luke xi. 13. And remember, it is not enough to read in the New Testament the history of the Saviour's life and death; many persons have done so all their lives,

without ever knowing Christ so as to love him. For "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost," 1 Cor. xii. 3. But if a little child is led to pray, "Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," Psa. cxix. 12, 18; the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity will regard that prayer, and the Holy Spirit will be given to that child. If he becomes your teacher, you will no longer read the Bible as a task. But reading it will be like hearing Jesus speak; telling you how much he loves you, and what great things he has done, and will do for you. It may then be said to you, as it was to some of the sheep of Christ long ago, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory," 1 Pet. i. 8. If you are diligent while you are young, you may perhaps become very learned; but all your learning will never teach you how to be happy, if you do not thus know Christ. The apostle Paul was a very learned man; but after he had been taught by the Spirit of God, he said, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ," Phil. iii. 7—10. And so intimate may believers be with Christ, even here on earth, that he compares it to his own knowledge of God his Father, verse 15. By frequently thinking of what Christ has done and said, continually praying, at the same time, for the influence of the Holy Spirit, Christians know more and more of Christ the longer they live. And when they come to die, they feel that they are going to see, not a stranger, but a kind and well-known friend. They can say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day," 2 Tim. i. 12.

In verse 16, the Saviour speaks of those who should afterwards become his sheep, though at that time they did not know him. He particularly meant to tell the Jews who heard him, that his gospel would soon be preached in all the nations of the world; and that many in every land should hear and believe it. God had chosen the nation of the Jews to be his own people; and the other nations had been separated from them, and, as it were, shut out of the fold. But when they believed the truth concerning Jesus, they would be as welcome into his church, and as happy and safe, as ever the children of Israel had been. And this is encouraging to us, who live at a great distance from the land of Canaan. When the Saviour was upon earth, our fathers in this island were heathens. But even in Britain, he designed to bring many sheep to his fold. Sinners hear his voice in the preaching of the gospel every sabbath day; and there are many to whom it may be said, "Ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls," 1 Pet. ii. 25. And there is a time coming, when all the sheep of Christ shall indeed be gathered together; when there "shall be one fold and one Shepherd." At present, the scattered flock are liable to sorrow and danger, and many troubles and fears. But "the Lord doth build up Jerusalem; he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds," Psal. cxlvii. 2, 3. He says, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Luke xii. 32. When he shall have brought them from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, there will be "a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues," Rev. vii. 9. Then "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Rev. vii. 17. They shall no more be kept at a distance from their Shepherd, or prevented

from seeing him : for they shall be "ever with the Lord."

PART III.

WE read in the Bible, that having sinned against God, we can receive no mercy from him, except for Christ's sake—on account of what Christ has done and suffered. But we are not to suppose that God the Father was unwilling to pardon sinners, or delighted in punishing them ; and that Christ's sufferings and obedience changed the Father's mind, and prevailed on him to pity us. Instead of this, we are told, that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," John iii. 16 : that "he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," Rom. viii. 32. And here, in verse 17, the Saviour says, that his Father loved him, because he willingly undertook to suffer in the place of sinners. Jesus Christ is God, equal with the Father. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are one God, alike powerful, wise, and good. Christ, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God : but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," Phil. ii. 6—8. He could not have been our Saviour, if he had not become a man ; and he not only was "despised and rejected of men," but he became as a Servant to his Father, that he might obey all his commands, which we have broken, and endure all his displeasure, which we have deserved. All the while that he humbled himself so low on earth, he was still almighty ; as he showed by the wonderful things which he did, Mark ii. 3—12 ; Luke viii. 25—35. And, at the same time, he was a man like other men, except only that he was without sin. It was as a man that he prayed to his Father, obeyed his Father's commands, and submitted to his Father's will, Heb. v. 7—9. And

when we read the history of these things, we should never forget, that they were all done, in the place of sinners, and for them. My dear children, you are ready to say, "This is more than we can understand:" and no wonder; for it is more than angels themselves can fully understand, 1 Pet. i. 12. That the eternal Son of God should have left his glory in heaven, to become a man on earth, and to die a shameful and cruel death, and all for the sake of sinful creatures, who had rebelled against him, is indeed love "which passeth knowledge," Eph. iii. 16—19. "Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory," 1 Tim. iii. 16. And shall all these wonders of love be described to you, and you feel no love to God in return? Can you hear of what Christ did, in order to save souls, and yet remain careless about the salvation of yours?

In verses 17, 18, the Saviour declares how willing he was to die: that he could die when he pleased, and return to life also when he pleased. Nay, more, that no man was able to take away his life, unless he himself permitted it. We read, that "a great multitude, with swords and staves, came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him." He made no resistance himself, nor would he allow any of his disciples to resist; but he said to one of them, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Matt. xxvi. 47—56. He was afterwards bound, and soldiers were employed to lead him away, and to crucify him: they also remained to watch him, after they had nailed him to the cross, Matt. xxvii. 2, 27—36. But he who had once passed safely through the very midst of a furious multitude, assembled on purpose to destroy him, Luke iv. 28—30, might easily have escaped from the hands of those who bound him; or even come down from the cross, if he had pleased. And surely he who had re-

stored dead persons to life, Luke viii. 49—55, John xi. 43, 44, could have prevented his own death, if he had chosen. Though he endured most painful sufferings on the cross, yet these would not have caused him to die as soon as he did. Pilate was quite surprised when he heard of his death, Mark xv. 44. And, far from having lost all his strength, we are told, that, just before he died, he cried with a loud voice, Mark xv. 37.

In verse 18, he tells us why he thus willingly laid down his life: "This commandment have I received of my Father." How can we sufficiently admire his ready obedience to the will of God! God has declared, that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins, Lev. xvii. 11; Heb. ix. 22; and Christ became a man, on purpose that he might shed his blood. We must remember, too, that besides his bodily sufferings, he had dreadful sorrow and pain of mind to endure, from feeling the displeasure of God against sin. Pain and suffering were as distressing to him as they are to us. And it must have been more bitter to him than we can imagine, to hear the anger of his Father, though it was for the sins of others. We may see how he felt, from the prayer that he used: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" yet, with such a dread of the fearful trial, he sweetly added, "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." Read Matt. xxvi. 36—44, and also xxvii. 46. And not one angry word fell from his lips, while he was spit upon, and struck, and mocked, and falsely blamed, Matt. xxvi. 59—68; xxvii. 27—31. In all this he was an example to us. And, if we believe that it was his love to us which brought him into this despised condition, we cannot but seek to imitate his meekness and patience in any trouble we may meet with. My youthful reader, how do you behave at such times? When you are ill, and your kind parents get medicine for you, do you refuse to take it? and are you fretful and impatient under pain and sickness? Listen to the words of the blessed Jesus, when his sorrows were greater than any human

creature could have borne: "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" John xviii. 11. Remember, too, that, as a sinner, you deserve far more than you can ever suffer in this world; and that if you believe in Jesus, his sufferings will obtain for you an eternal deliverance from all misery. Does your cheek flush with anger, when a companion says any thing to affront you? Do you lift your hands to strike, when, perhaps, your playfellow had only spoken the truth? Look at Jesus in the midst of his enemies, who spoke to him in the most provoking manner, yet he answered not a word; and hear him say, when they nailed him to the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

But the glory that followed the death of Christ was as great as his sufferings had been. He says, "I lay down my life, that I may take it again." His body was laid in a tomb; a great stone was rolled to the mouth of it, and his enemies set soldiers to watch the place, that none might open it. But he had foretold the time that his body should continue there; and as soon as that time was past, he arose and left the tomb without any difficulty. An angel rolled away the stone; and that body, which had been stiff and cold in death, was seen again active and alive, Matt. xxvii. 59—66; xxviii. 1—7. But the rising of Christ from the dead was intended to show something else, besides his own power to take life again. By raising him from the dead, God intended to teach us, that he was perfectly satisfied with what Christ had done and suffered for sinners. He had endured all that was necessary, in order to deliver men from eternal death. And as he had died instead of them, so, when he rose again, it was to show that all who believe in him shall also be raised to everlasting life. Oh what a cheerful appearance this gives to the grave! Death is gloomy, especially to children. Now, what is it that makes you afraid to die? It is your having sinned against God; for "the sting of death is sin." But Christ has finished transgression, and made

an end of sin. He has made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness, Dan. ix. 24. To those who believe in him, God has promised, that their sins and iniquities he will remember no more, Heb. x. 17. Jesus has gone into heaven, but he is still engaged as the Saviour of sinners. "By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them," Heb. ix. 12; vii. 25. He has gone to prepare a place in his Father's house for all his disciples, John xiv. 2, 3. Their bodies must, indeed, lie for a season in the dust; but "if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." 1 Thess. iv. 14. And then he shall change this "vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself," Phil. iii. 21.

But let us remember that while some shall awake to everlasting life, some shall arise to shame and everlasting contempt, Dan. xii. 2. Those who would not enter the fold of God by Christ, the door, must dwell for ever with their cruel enemies, the devil and his angels. Oh, then, "strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door," Luke xiii. 24, 25. If we could suppose a wolf able to speak, it might try to persuade a sheep that it was very unpleasant to be confined in a fold, or permitted to go only where the shepherd pleased; that it would be much better to roam about at liberty; and that it could soon run to the fold, and be admitted, if any danger appeared. If the sheep were silly enough to believe all this, it would soon find that the wolf wanted only to devour it: and it would then wish in vain that the shepherd were near to deliver it. In like manner, you may be led to think,

that it is dull and tiresome to do the will of Christ, and to be always attending to his voice. You may fancy that those are the most cheerful who go astray, every one in his own way. But be assured, Satan is only trying to make you believe this, that you may be for ever as miserable as himself. And I am certain every child who fears the Lord from his youth, will say, that he finds "peace and joy in believing" the words of Christ; and that "great peace have they who love God's law," Rom. xv. 13; Psa. cxix. 165. Jesus loves his sheep, and kindly calls them his own; and they gladly confess, that they are not their own, for they are bought with a price; that they should glorify God in their body, and in their spirit, which are God's, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." Heb. xiii. 20, 21.





THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

LUKE X. 25—37.

THE question which this lawyer put to the Saviour, ver. 25, is a most important one. And certainly the Lord Jesus Christ, who had "the words of eternal life," John vi. 68, who came that his people "might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," John x. 10, was the best that could be applied to, to answer such a question. But it does not appear that the lawyer spoke on this occasion from any real anxiety about his own eternal salvation. It is said, that "he stood up and tempted Christ." He wished to obtain an answer which he might be able to find fault with. And this was a method often used by the Saviour's enemies: see Matt. xxii. 15; Luke xx. 27. But they "were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." In every such case, where they had expected a triumph, they were completely silenced.

But though he was perfectly acquainted with their intention, he never answered them in an angry or impatient manner. On the contrary, he always took the opportunity to convey much valuable instruction, which remains in the Bible for our benefit. A lawyer was one who professed to explain the law of God. The Saviour, therefore, asked him, ver. 26, what was written in the law? He readily gave an answer, ver. 27, which the Saviour, in ver. 28, assured him was perfectly right. For if any man could perfectly and constantly love God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, he should obtain eternal life. The lawyer, perhaps, thought that no one could find fault with him as to his love to God; but his conduct to his fellow creatures being better known, he felt that it would not bear examination; and, in order to make some excuse for himself, ver. 29, he "said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" Jesus then related to him the story of the Good Samaritan, which is generally supposed to be not a parable, that is, not an account of what might possibly have happened, but a history of something which really had happened. It is said that many priests and Levites lived at Jericho, who might often have to travel between that place and Jerusalem; and it has been also remarked, that as the road lay through a desert, it was likely to be much infested with robbers. The poor man here mentioned, who "fell among thieves," had no one to help him, or to deliver him out of their hands. Being left naked and severely wounded, he was unable to proceed on his journey. Night was approaching, and perhaps the wild beasts of the desert were more terrific than even the cruel robbers. How eagerly would he listen for the footsteps of a fellow traveller! and when at length he heard them, how anxiously would he expect their assistance! He might naturally think that no one could see his deplorable condition, without at least trying to relieve him. But once and again he was doomed to bitter disappointment. Ver. 31, "By chance there came down a cer-

tain priest that way :” a priest, the minister of mercy, would surely pity the distressed ; but “ when he saw him, he passed by on the other side,” that he might not be detained by listening to the wounded man’s complaints, and perhaps to save his own feelings, as he was determined not to yield to them. Ver. 32, “ And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him.” How wistfully would the languid eyes be fixed on *him*, to discover whether or not there was pity in his looks ! but no ; he also “ passed by on the other side.” His hopes again disappointed, and that, too, by one who was engaged in the particular service of God, the poor forsaken traveller would begin to think that he really was left to perish, in darkness and alone.

Ver. 33. “ But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was : and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.” We are informed, that “ the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans,” John iv. 9. The two nations had a peculiar hatred to one another ; they each abhorred the religion of the other ; and each thought that the other was entirely shut out from the favour of God. The priest and the Levite might excuse themselves, by saying that they had no time to spare ; or that, if they stopped, they should be themselves in danger from the thieves. The Samaritan might, with equal reason, have said the same ; and besides this, it was a most unusual thing for a Samaritan even to speak to a Jew ; and it was too probable that a Jew would have refused to help him, if he had been in the same circumstances. But none of these considerations could prevent this Samaritan from helping a fellow creature in distress. The 34th and 35th verses give a simple and beautiful account of his kindness. He was not satisfied, until he had done all that was necessary in order to restore the man to health. Every thing that he did seems to have been done with the greatest attention and tenderness. He spared neither expense, nor trouble, nor fatigue. If he had rode on to the inn, and sent some one from thence to fetch the

wounded man, it would have been showing kindness. But with his own hand he bound up his wounds; he gave him his own beast to ride on; and during the night, he himself nursed and attended him. He knew not how long illness might detain him there, or how much money might be required to pay the innkeeper for his care of him; yet he freely engaged to pay whatever might be required; and most likely his character was well known, so that his promise was readily believed.

Verses 36, 37. After Jesus had finished the story, he said to the lawyer, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him." Thus the lawyer was taught to answer his own question. When we speak of a neighbour, we generally think of some one who lives in the same house or the same street or neighbourhood with ourselves. But here, two men are called neighbours who probably belonged to different nations, and were entire strangers to one another. And this teaches us that the law of loving our neighbour as ourselves, takes in every fellow creature in the world. The Saviour himself, in another place, gives the best explanation of this law, when he says, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets," Matt. vii. 12. Of course there are multitudes of people in the world whom we shall never see; but if we love our neighbours as ourselves, we shall make "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men," 1 Tim. ii. 1, as regularly and earnestly as we do for ourselves.

The Saviour's admonition to the lawyer was, "Go, and do thou likewise;" and so, my dear reader, would I say to you. You may naturally reply, "I am but a child; I cannot traverse lonely roads in order to assist distressed travellers." That may be very true; but the Saviour did not mean to say, "Go, and do exactly what the Samaritan did;" but, "Go, and act in the same

spirit as he showed." Now, if a neighbour of yours died, and left a lovely little infant, with pretty bright eyes, and rosy cheeks, do you not think it would delight you to nurse that baby, and feed it, and amuse it all day long? and would not this be showing kindness to your neighbour? Yes; but if you obey the law we are speaking of, you would be equally willing to assist a ragged, deformed, and dirty beggar, who was dying in a cellar. If a favourite companion of yours was sick, would you not feel great pleasure in leaving your play, to sit by him, and read to him, and try to amuse him? But supposing you know an aged person living alone, and her eyes growing dim, so that she cannot see; if you love your neighbour as yourself, you will be willing to lead the old woman out, that she may enjoy the fresh air and sunshine, though her steps may be very slow, and her company by no means amusing; or, if she likes better to sit at the fireside, you will offer to read to her, though she may be hard of hearing, and her dwelling far less comfortable than yours. Or, once more, suppose that a blind man passed your door, singing sweetly, or playing a merry tune on the violin, would you not wish to carry him a penny? It is right to assist the blind. But remember, the poor heathen in the deserts of Africa is quite blind, as to God, and every thing that concerns the soul: he is your neighbour too; and you should be as willing to give your penny to help to send the gospel to him. Remember, however, that no child ought to do any of these things without asking leave of his parents. A child cannot judge what is proper to be done in such cases. And besides, a child who does not obey that command, "Honour thy father and thy mother," shows at once that he does not love his neighbour as himself. That would be a most base and unworthy child, who should be noticed and remarked for his attention to the poor and afflicted, while his parents at home could tell that they themselves were neglected and disobeyed.

And now, do you wish to comply with the Saviour's

command, "Go, and do thou likewise?" It is well if you do. But remember, you cannot on this account hope for eternal life. You have already broken the law of love, both to God and your neighbour, ten thousand times. And think of those fearful words, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," Gal. iii. 10. But "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," Gal. iii. 13. He has set us an example how we should love our neighbours as ourselves. There was nothing lovely in the character of sinners, nothing pleasant in the work of redeeming them; yet He remembered them in their "low estate; for his mercy endureth for ever," Psa. cxxxvi. 23. He looked, and there was none to help; and he wondered that there was none to uphold; therefore his own arm brought salvation, Isa. lxiii. 5. He hath magnified the law, and made it honourable, Isa. xlii. 21. It is by faith in him that sinners "are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses," Acts xiii. 39; and "faith worketh by love, Gal. v. 6." "Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love," 1 Cor. xiii. 13





THE PARABLE OF THE BARREN FIG TREE.

LUKE XIII. 6—9.

IN trying to understand any passage of Scripture, it is always a good way to read both what is said before and what is said after it. It also would make it more easily understood, if you were to consider who it was that spoke the words of which you wish to know the meaning, and who the people were to whom the words were spoken. The parable of the barren fig tree was spoken by Jesus Christ to the Jews; and what he had just before been saying to them was, that except they repented they must perish. I will presently try to show you how the parable means the same thing.

Perhaps you never saw a fig tree; there are very few in this country, but in that country where the Saviour preached they are quite common. The fig tree mentioned in the parable had had every thing done for it that was necessary in order to make it thrive, and it was

old enough to bear fruit ; yet there never had been a single fig on it, though the master of the vineyard had been carefully seeking, for three years, to see if it bore any. He thought it was a pity to let the ground be occupied with such a useless tree, and he desired the gardener to cut it down ; but the gardener begged that it might stand yet another year, and he said that he would do all he could for it, and that perhaps it might still bear fruit ; but if it did not, he would then cut it down.

If you read Isa. v. 1—7, you will see something very much like this parable, and which may help you to understand it. The fig tree planted in a vineyard seems to mean the nation of the Jews ; and the dressing, and pruning, and watering of the fig tree, mean all those religious advantages which that nation enjoyed. No other nation had God's word, or his public worship, or his servants living among them, to tell them his will. Neither had God done for any other nation what he had done for them.* Therefore, it was certainly reasonable to expect that they should love God, and do every thing that he commanded. But this was far from being the case ; and God had often threatened that he would cast them off, and take from them all those good things that he had given them. But still he was unwilling to do so. He had waited many years, to give them space to repent ; and when this parable was addressed to them, they were to be spared yet a little longer. But the Saviour meant it as a warning to them, that the judgments foretold against them were now very near at hand, if they did not speedily begin to do "works meet for repentance."

But though this parable was at first meant for the Jews, it is written in the Bible for you, my young friends, to read, and it is intended for your instruction. Those who live in Britain may be said to be planted in a vineyard ; for here we have so many opportunities

* See Explanation of the Householder who plan'd a Vineyard.

of learning the will of God. And are there not some of my readers who have godly parents? They have instructed you in true religion ever since you could speak. They have set you a good example, they have prayed with you every day, they have taken you to the house of God, and how often have they entreated you to seek the salvation of your souls! Have not many of you attended a Sunday school, where you have kind teachers, who often tell you about the love of Christ, and about the happiness of those little children who love him? Do not some of you attend a place of worship, where the minister is very affectionate and earnest with the young? Does he not sometimes preach sermons on purpose for young people; or meet some of them on a week day in a Bible class? Surely, then, it may well be expected that you should bear fruit. Whether you have thought of it or not, God has been seeking fruit of you, and that perhaps for more than three years.

Do you think he has found any fruit? Has he found you obeying your parents in all things, and at all times, whether they saw you or not? Has he seen you diligent in learning your lessons, and showing respectful attention to what your teachers have said to you? Has he seen you behaving with reverence in his house, and trying to remember and understand all you heard there? Has he observed that you kept from play and from idle talk during the whole sabbath day; and spent the time properly, even when no one saw you? Has he heard you pray to him every morning and evening, when no eye but his own was upon you? Has he always heard you speak the truth, even when it was against yourself? Has he seen you kind and affectionate to your brothers and sisters, and a peacemaker among your playfellows! Such are some of the fruits that he has been seeking; if you are conscious that you have behaved in this manner, do not be proud of it, but be thankful to Him who gave you good instruction, and enabled you to profit by it.

And do you think that you have borne as much fruit as you might have done? Try to find out, whether there are not some little things you could do, that would make you more useful to your parents. Think whether you could not teach your younger brothers and sisters some of those good things which you have been taught. See if you could not contrive some way of showing kindness to sick or poor people, that you have not yet thought of. In short, if you can think of anything that it would be right for you to do, which you have as yet neglected, remember that even you are, in some degree, cumberers of the ground.

But I fear there are some of my readers, who know that God has not found any good fruit at all on them. You, children, should be very thankful that he has not cut you down already; but remember that he may now be saying of one or another of you, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Your pious parents, or teachers, or ministers, have been grieved to see you still unfruitful, year after year; they have prayed earnestly that the Lord would spare you, in the hope that you might improve. They have tried new ways of teaching, and laboured to contrive how they might make you remember and attend to your lessons. Sometimes they have punished, and sometimes they have rewarded you; they have talked and prayed with you alone, as earnestly and affectionately as they possibly could. And has it been all in vain? Ah! you little know what they have felt, when they have seen that you slighted all their kind and tender admonitions. While you are playing in the streets or the fields, forgetful of every thing but the game that you are engaged in, they are often sighing and mourning over you: while you are sound asleep, they are passing sleepless hours, and wetting their pillow with tears on your account. Though you disregard these tears, and sighs, and prayers, God views them with kindness and pity; and perhaps it is only because of them that he has spared you so long. But he will not always suffer you to

cumber his ground. The gardener begged that the fig tree might stand another year, but you are not sure of being spared another week. Oh, if you should be cut down in your present unfruitful state, how dreadful would your condition be! You know that useless trees, when they are cut down, are fit for nothing but to be burned in the fire. "Who can dwell with the devouring fire? who can dwell with everlasting burnings?"

The present moment is all that you can call your own; from this moment, then, begin to bear fruit. Let not the care and trouble bestowed on you be any longer in vain. Though you have been barren so many years, God still encourages you to become fruitful; he still says to you, "My son, give me thine heart. Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?" And here let me tell you, that unless you give your heart to God, you will never bear such fruit as to please him; unless you have him to be the guide of your youth, you will never keep the good resolutions you may make. The heart is like the root of the tree; if the root is not good, the fruit cannot be good: and so even if you should behave so well as to please your parents, yet if God sees that your hearts are still evil, he will continue to reckon you cumberers of his ground. Indeed, you would find it a very hard and hopeless task to do all that you know to be right, if you were to attempt it with an unrenewed heart. But trust in that Almighty Saviour who saves his people from their sins. Pray that, for his sake, you may obtain a new heart and a right spirit. He can make the most barren trees to be "covered with all the fruits of righteousness." If you seek his grace, you shall assuredly obtain it, and it will make you to spring up, "as willows by the water-courses." "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing," Psa. xcii. 13, 14



PARABLES OF THE LOST SHEEP, AND PIECE
OF MONEY.

LUKE XV. 3—10.

In the beginning of the chapter which contains these parables, we are told, that "all the publicans and sinners drew near" to the Saviour to hear him. Publicans were tax-gatherers for the Romans, who had conquered Judea, and set a governor over it. Many of these publicans were noted for being cruel and oppressive to the Jews. And the phrase "publicans and sinners," as used in the New Testament, is generally intended to mean persons who had been remarkably wicked;

persons who acted so very improperly, that no one of decent character liked to be seen in their company. "The Pharisees and scribes murmured," because the Saviour allowed such openly sinful people to come near him. The "Pharisees and scribes" were thought to be holier men than others. They were accustomed to make very long prayers; they gave much money to the poor, and they were particularly exact in attending to some of the outward duties commanded by the law of God. They were proud of all this, and despised all those who did not act in the same way as themselves, but especially "publicans and sinners." In order to humble the pride of those persons, and, at the same time, to encourage the greatest sinner to come to Him, the Saviour spoke these parables. The lost sheep, and the lost piece of money, are both intended to teach the same things; namely, the joy which it gives to God and to all other holy beings, to see them saved from that condition, the condition of all sinners, whether old or young, who are still in their natural state.

There are many things in which sinners are very much like lost sheep, and in the Bible they are often compared to them: see Psa. cxix. 176; Isa. liii. 6. A sheep is more apt to wander than almost any other animal, and it scarcely ever finds its way back again, but continues to wander further and further. It is quite helpless: it has no strength to defend itself from wild beasts; if it gets fast among briars and thorns, it cannot disentangle itself again; if it fall into a stream, it is not likely that it will be able to swim out; and if it does not happen to meet with pasture, it will not know where to seek it. Sooner or later, it will certainly be destroyed, unless it is found and brought back to the fold.

You would pity a poor sheep in such distress; but, my dear children, your souls are much more to be pitied, while you continue to wander from God. You all began to wander from him, (that is, to show that you loved any thing else better than doing his will,) as soon

as you were able to do any thing : see Psa. li. 5 ; lviii. 3. You soon began to be passionate, and to cry and fret, when you were not allowed to have your own way. You soon began to disobey your parents ; and if they talked to you about God, your Father in heaven, and tried to tell you how much you ought to love him, you were soon weary of hearing them.

As the wild beast would destroy a poor wandering sheep, so " your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." He is a cruel enemy to your souls ; he would rejoice in their everlasting destruction, and he has many ways of trying to destroy them. He is much stronger and more cunning than you, and you cannot defend yourselves from him. As you grow older, you will be more and more tempted to do wrong, and you will find that " the way of transgressors is hard." You will find that sin brings misery even in this world ; and even if you wish to return to God, you will find it much more difficult than it would have been when you were young. Indeed, if you try to return by yourselves, without seeking the help of the good Shepherd, it will be impossible. After wandering on this " waste howling wilderness," you will at last " stumble on the dark mountains," Jer. xiii. 16, and fall into that lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, Rev. xx. 10.

In selecting a piece of money as the subject of the second parable, the Saviour perhaps alluded to the infinite value of every soul, Matt. xvi. 26 : the soul of the youngest child will live after all the world has been burned up. Your bodies and souls, my youthful readers, belong to God. They are his property, for he made them ; and they ought to be entirely employed in such a manner as to answer his purposes, and do his pleasure. But sinners are compared to money which is lost, and which can, of course, be of no use to the person it belongs to. You are not capable of being employed in the service of God, while you have no love to him, and no wish to please him.

But your being lost, means something more than this : it means, that unless you are brought back to God, you will be lost, that is, ruined and miserable for ever.

Now, Jesus Christ came "to save that which was lost;" to show lost sinners the way back to God. Observe, the man had ninety-nine sheep besides the one that wandered; the woman had nine pieces of silver beside the one which was lost. So God had multitudes of angels in heaven, who never offended him; they serve and glorify him continually. But so great were his love and pity to sinners who had wilfully wandered, and had no desire to return, that Jesus Christ left the praises and services of those holy beings, and came into this miserable world, on purpose to bring sinners back. Nay, he even paid a great price for them, nothing less than his own blood, that they might be his own. As the man and woman mentioned in the parable, searched diligently till they found what they had lost, so Jesus Christ is continually seeking your souls. He has given you the Bible to tell you of your danger. He gives you parents, and teachers, and ministers, to warn you what will be the end of your present wanderings, and to describe to you the happiness of those who return to God. Though you have forgotten or slighted many of their kind admonitions already, yet still they continue to instruct you again and again; and they do so because they know that the Saviour commands them.

Christ is waiting to be gracious to you. He is able to deliver you from Satan; he can give you power to resist temptation. His Spirit will teach you to love God, and hate every thing that is displeasing to him; and because of what the Saviour suffered, God is ready to receive you. He is "not willing that any should perish;" he entreats you to return to him; and if you do, he will rejoice over you. The persons mentioned in the parables called upon their friends and neighbours to rejoice with them when they found what they had lost: and the Saviour adds, that "likewise joy shall be in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God, over

one sinner that repenteth." Observe, that when sinners are brought back to God, they are said to "repent;" that is, they are grieved and ashamed for all their past sins, and they earnestly desire to be kept from sin for the time to come.

Let none think that they have already wandered too far to return. It was the chief of sinners that Jesus came to seek and to save. He can make even liars learn to love truth; he can teach swearers to fear an oath; and even should you have been so wicked as to mock at good people, and to laugh at religion, yet he can make you to delight in it yourselves. Come to him just as you are, and he will put you among the sheep of his pasture to-day, if ye will hear his voice. Your past wanderings will then no more be mentioned or remembered against you, because he has borne the punishment which they deserved; and you will wander no more, for he will lead and guide you, and make you to walk "in the paths of righteousness." Again I would say, come to him *immediately*, for there may be "but a step between you and death."

But some of my readers may, perhaps, be like the scribes and Pharisees, imagining that they are just persons, who need no repentance. They are not liars or swearers; disorderly or rude; they are, in general, obedient to their parents, and their friends think them very good children. But if they are proud of these things, and think that they have no sins to repent of, let them remember that they are not approved by God: "God resisteth the proud." If they suppose that by their good conduct they can deserve his favour, they are much mistaken; for he has said, that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." They, "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God:" and this cannot but be very displeasing to him; because it is the same thing as if they said that God need not have sent his Son into the world to save sin-

ners, for they can save themselves. Let these parables teach them, that the repentance and conversion of one poor wicked child would be far more pleasing to God, than all the good behaviour which they boast of. They may despise those children who lie, and steal, and take God's name in vain; but if they should at last see some of them, converted by the grace of Christ, entering into the kingdom of heaven, while they themselves are shut out, oh how dreadful will it be!

But, before I have done, I would fain try to convince them, that there really is less difference than they suppose between them and those wicked children whom they despise. I feel anxious to do so, because I know that it is impossible for them to be happy, while they continue to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think.

Let them remember, that "the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart;" and the pride which he sees in their hearts is quite as displeasing to him as lying or swearing would be. Besides, it is not enough only to behave well; he knows their *reasons* for behaving well; and if these are not good, the best outward conduct can never meet his approbation. They go regularly to the Sunday school; but is it because they love instruction, and are desirous to learn the way to heaven? Is it not rather that they may get praise, and perhaps a reward for regular attendance? They always say their lessons correctly, and even perhaps learn voluntary lessons; but is this because they love the Bible, and desire to have their memories stored with its truths? or is it because they wish their teachers to think them more clever and attentive than their schoolfellows? They obey their parents; but do they obey them because God has said, "Honour thy father and thy mother?" or are they obedient, only because they know that they would be punished for disobedience?

Let me affectionately beg of all my readers, who are

self righteous like the Pharisees, to put such questions as these to themselves. Let them sit down quietly and alone, and think over every thing they do, for which they are accustomed to be praised, or which they think deserves praise. Let them try to find out the true reason they have had for every thing they have done; and seriously ask themselves, if they should be willing that their parents or teachers should always know it. Let them try to imagine how they shall feel in that day, when "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ." And I think they will find, that instead of needing no repentance, their very best performances need to be repented of. I am quite sure of one thing, that they have never behaved well for the *right* reason. None can behave well from a proper reason who do not love God. If they love God, they would always try to behave well; but instead of being satisfied with themselves, they would be always grieving that they could not do better. Oh let them no longer trust in a refuge of lies, but humbly confess their sins, and trust in that compassionate Saviour, who came "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."





THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

LUKE XV. 11—32.

THIS beautiful parable seems to have been spoken by our Lord, at the same time with those of the lost sheep and lost piece of silver. And probably the same persons were present to hear them all; namely, the scribes and Pharisees, and those publicans and sinners whom they despised. Keeping this in mind, we shall better understand what follows.

"A certain man had two sons." The Saviour says nothing about their childhood; but it is likely that they were brought up in comfort and plenty, and that their father allowed them every reasonable indulgence. However, the younger son was discontented at home: probably disliking the restraint of his father's authority. In a very rude and undutiful manner, he said, "Father,

give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.' The father must have felt hurt and grieved at such a request, but he did not refuse; he divided all that he had between his two sons. It might have been expected that after so much kindness received, the sons would feel it their duty to remain with their father, and do all in their power to make the rest of his life happy. But instead of this, before many days had passed over, "the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country." He seems to have felt no concern at leaving home, and parting with his affectionate father. No doubt he expected to be very happy when he should be his own master, and at liberty to do as he pleased. But he found himself sadly mistaken. He was so wicked and extravagant in that distant country, that he soon spent all he had. He had no friend to help him, for he was among strangers; and, to add to his distress, "there arose a mighty famine in that land," so that even those who might pity him had nothing to give away. There was one person who gave him employment, but it does not appear that he gave him any food. "He sent him into his fields to feed swine." This would be reckoned a very mean and unpleasant occupation to a Jew; for swine were among those animals which the law forbade them to eat, or even touch: see Lev. xi. 7, 8. What a change of condition was this! He, who so lately lived with a tender father, fed, and clothed, and waited upon, and allowed to want for nothing, now employed in work to which the meanest of his father's servants would not have been called! And so pinched with hunger was he, that he even envied the swine their coarse nauseous husks.

Now, my young friends, before I try to explain to you what the Saviour chiefly meant to teach us by this part of the parable, I would remark, that there are too many young people now, who act very much in the same way as the younger son did, and bring themselves into misery as great as his. Perhaps among my readers

there are none who have actually done so ; but I fear there may be some, who have sometimes wished that they were old enough to do it. No doubt, some of them have pious parents, who endeavour to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." On the sabbath they take them to the house of God, and they do not allow them to play, or to walk in the fields, on that holy day. They do not carry them to fairs, or races, or the theatre, nor will they suffer them to go to such places of amusement. You, who have such parents, ought to be truly thankful ; and you should always remember, that when they act in this way, they are giving the strongest proofs of their affection for you. But, perhaps, you dislike such restraints, and when you see other children spending the sabbath in play, and following every vain and sinful pleasure, you are apt to envy them, and to wish yourselves in their place. You would gladly join with them, if you might, in doing what you know would be highly displeasing to those whom it is your duty to obey. But though you are now prevented from running with the multitude to do evil, do not you secretly intend, that whenever it is in your power to act as you please, you will indulge in sinful pursuits? Do not you sometimes wish for the time when you shall be old enough to escape from the eye and the restraints of your parents? Nay, you may even have resolved to choose some business, or profession, that will necessarily carry you into distant places, on purpose that you may sin without control.

And is this the return you make for all the years of care, and anxiety, and trouble, which your parents have spent on your account? Your mother nursed you when you were helpless babes. Many a sleepless night she has passed, while she tried to soothe your infant complaints, and perhaps wept over your pain, when she could not relieve it. Many a day she has carried you about in her arms, or stooped over you, to teach you to walk, when her own strength was almost exhausted. How many hours has she plied her needle, that you

might be neatly and comfortably clothed, when she stood greatly in need of exercise, or of rest! And your father, what has he done for you? He has been diligent in business, perhaps he has toiled very hard, six days in the week, that he might earn bread for you to eat. Perhaps he has exerted himself beyond his strength, to earn something more, in order that he might put you to school. Or, he may have been himself your teacher, and patiently instructed you when you were very slow to learn. And how much kind advice, and what affectionate admonitions have you received from both parents! How often have they prayed with you, and how much oftener have they prayed for you! And is it really possible, that you can wish to grieve such parents? Could you reward so much love and tenderness, by doing that which would almost break their hearts? Oh, be entreated to lay aside for ever the thoughts of such wickedness.

But if you think little of the sufferings that might be occasioned to your parents, will you not tremble to think of the misery that you might bring on yourselves! Doubtless the prodigal son had wicked companions, who called themselves his friends while he had money to spend with them. But when distress and want came upon him, not one of those companions appeared to comfort or to relieve him. And so it will ever be found; there is no true love or friendship among the wicked. In the time of health and prosperity they may encourage each other in sin, and take delight in one another's company; but when sickness or sorrow comes, "miserable comforters are they all." And sorrow and sickness will be the worse to bear, if (as is often the case) they have been brought on by those very sins that once seemed so delightful. But even without such afflictions, how could any one be happy, while under a peculiar curse of the Almighty? See Deut. xxvii. 16; Prov. xx. 20; xxx. 17.

But to return to the parable itself. There are many of my youthful readers who shudder at the thought

of such unnatural conduct as I have been describing. You, my dear children, love your parents, and you would be sorry to grieve them. But do you love God, your Father in heaven, and are you afraid to offend him? He gave you life, and brought you into the world at first; and he has fed you, and led you all your lives long till now. Every pleasure and enjoyment you have possessed was bestowed by him. Above all, he has made known his wonderful love to you, in giving his beloved Son to die for sinners. Now, do you feel grateful to God for all this kindness? Do you wish above all things to please him, and do you "esteem all his commandments, concerning all things, to be right?" Or, is the keeping of them a task and a burden to you? Do you say or think of the sabbath, "What a weariness is it! and when will it be over?" And do you wonder how people can find any pleasure in hearing God's word, or in thinking upon it? If such be the case, then, however amiable and dutiful you may be to your parents and friends, you are acting towards God quite as ungratefully as the prodigal did to his father. It is true, you cannot go from the presence of God, or hide yourselves from his eye; but you try as much as possible to forget that he sees you.

When the Saviour described the misery to which the prodigal son was brought, he intended to teach us that all who rebel against God are miserable. This is frequently spoken of in the Bible: see Prov. iv. 19; xxii. 5; Jer. ii. 12. But perhaps you may say, "We are not miserable; we enjoy our play as much as any children can do; we do not know how we could be happier than we are." Ah, my young friends, if you think so, it is only because you do not believe what God says to you in his word. He says that "God is angry with the wicked every day;" that "the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." Is it possible that you could be happy, if you really believed that this was true? Think what the anger of an *almighty* God must be!

At present you forget his anger, because you do not feel it; but will you be able to say that you are happy, when "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God?" Observe, particularly, one part of the prodigal's misery: "he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him." This is probably meant to teach us, that the pleasures of sin can never satisfy the mind; it will always have a craving desire after something more. People may obtain one thing after another; they may even be able to procure *every* gratification that they wish for; but they will still be as ill-satisfied as the prodigal would have been, after eating the husks on which the swine were fed. Husks were not proper food for a man; and so the things of this world were never intended to be food for the soul. God made the soul to live for ever, and nothing but that which will last for ever can make it truly happy.

But miserable as the condition of the younger son was, it seems to have been a long time before he thought of trying to escape from it. "When he came to himself, he said," etc. This expression, "When he came to himself," means that before that time, he had been like a madman, out of his senses. Unless this had been the case, he would certainly sooner have resolved to return to his father's house, where "there was bread enough and to spare." Now this is just like the conduct of those who continue to live without seeking to be restored to the favour of God. As my readers are young, they have not yet tried all the enjoyments of this world. And perhaps they think that, when they are older, if they really find that nothing on earth can make them happy, they will then begin to seek for happiness in religion. But if they think so, they are only deceiving themselves. There are people who have lived for many years in the service of Satan, seeking for happiness in worldly things, and continually meeting with disappointment; constantly saying, "Who will show us any good?" and never finding any one that can do it. And

yet these persons are still as eager as ever in following those very pursuits that have hitherto disappointed them.

Let the young, then, be entreated to return to God, before they have proceeded any further in the paths of iniquity. "Come, ye children, hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good, seek peace, and pursue it," *Psa. xxxiv. 11—14.* But if you will still persist in despising the favour of God, and preferring "the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season," remember, that every sin you commit will harden your heart, and blind your eyes more and more. Satan will bind you to his service as with chains, he will lead you captive at his will.

We must now go on to consider the latter part of the parable, which is intended to show the love of God to sinners, and his willingness to receive them back, even when they have long chosen to wander from him. But though this gives encouragement to *every* sinner *immediately* to return, let none presume to resolve that they will first weary themselves with those things which are "vanity and vexation of spirit."

The repenting prodigal did not frame any excuse for his conduct. He did not think that he deserved to be called a son, he was willing to be treated as a hired servant, if his father would only allow him once more to live in his house. And if you wish to obtain the favour of God, you must seek it in the same spirit. You must not think that because you are children, and have not been openly wicked and indecent, therefore *you* need not beg so humbly for mercy. If you have loved other objects better than God, and chosen other pleasures rather than those that are to be found in his ways, you have been guilty of the blackest ingratitude, and "it is of the Lord's mercies that you are not consumed."

Observe, also, how glad the father was to see his son return. He did not stay till his son came to him; "but when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." And thus God is waiting to be gracious to every sinner that will return to him. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The father did not reproach his son with misconduct, he did not even mention it to him. He interrupted him with expressions of kindness, before he had finished his humble petition. Thus God has promised, to those who return to him, that "their sins and their iniquities he will remember no more." This is not because he thinks slightly of their sins, for sin is that abominable thing which he hates, Jer. iv. 4. The only reason why he will remember their sins no more is, that he laid upon his beloved Son the iniquities of them all, Isa. liii, 6.

The father not only welcomed his son back, but he immediately supplied all his wants, and made a feast of rejoicing for his return, and showed his love and regard for him before all the rest of the family. And God has every thing to bestow on returning sinners, that they can possibly need.* He calls them his children, and teaches them to call him Father, Gal. iv. 6, 7. He honours them even in time, by permitting them to draw near to him at all times in prayer. But he promises yet more highly to honour them, at the end of time, Mal. iii. 17, 18; and through eternity they shall dwell in his own house above, where they shall be continually happy in his love.

The unkind and unnatural conduct of the elder son, was intended by our Lord to describe the character of the scribes and Pharisees, who murmured because he received the publicans and sinners. There will always be people like the Pharisees, who fancy themselves better than others, and despise those who are willing to

* See Explanation of the Wedding Garment.

own that they are sinners. But whatever men may say or do, "the Lord reigneth," and none can hinder him from doing all his pleasure. He is "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," Exod. xxxiv. 6. It is impossible to express the guilt and folly of those who will not love this Best of beings. And it is equally impossible to describe the happiness of those who have chosen him for their God. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," Psa. lxxxiv. 11.





THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

LUKE XVI. 19—31.

THIS parable tells us of a man who had a great deal of wealth, wearing fine clothes, and faring "sumptuously every day." But though he had possessed all those outward enjoyments, he did not love God, and therefore could not be happy. This rich man died; for all his money could not bribe death to keep away from him a single hour. He had to leave all his possessions, and all his pleasures, to enter on the possession of misery which he could never leave.

The parable also tells us of a very poor man, a beggar, named Lazarus. He was not only in poverty, but also in a state of affliction and disease. He had no kind children or friends to come and sympathize with him and relieve him; no surgeon or nurse to dress his wounds, and lessen his pain. So very wretched was he in his

outward circumstances, that he had not clothes even to cover those painful wounds which the dogs came and licked. But though Lazarus was in such a destitute condition, yet he was a good man, and no doubt his mind was in a much happier state than that of the rich man, with all his outward comforts. The beggar also died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. Being in Abraham's bosom, means a place in heaven near that holy man; and it intimates that Lazarus was an eminent believer, that God loved him, and took him to dwell for ever there.

Here we have a striking proof of the vanity of this world, and how foolish those people are who prefer its objects to those of eternity; who attend to the concerns of the body, and neglect those of the soul. Perhaps some young people, looking only at the outward circumstances of these two men while they were living on earth, would prefer the situation of the rich man to that of poor afflicted Lazarus; but follow them into the world of spirits, look at the difference of their circumstances there—the one miserable, and the other happy—and then decide! And indeed, this is the only way to decide justly and safely. The young are in great danger of being deceived by appearances, and of *fancying* those alone to be happy who are rich, have fine clothes, and every thing nice to eat and drink. It is, therefore, by attending to this parable, and other parts of the word of God, that they can see how a man may be happy, though in affliction and in poverty; and that unhappiness may dwell in the heart of the man who is "clothed in purple and fine linen."

But let not my young reader suppose that Lazarus was happy, or went to heaven *because* he was poor and afflicted. By no means; he was happy because he possessed the faith of Abraham; he loved God and his commandments. It was religion that comforted his heart in the midst of all his outward sufferings. Poverty and affliction are in themselves evils, part of the sufferings which even good people are called to endure in this

world. In such circumstances, nothing but the gospel of Jesus Christ can comfort the heart. You know that there are many poor people discontented and unhappy, because they are in poverty; and if disease is added, they are wretched indeed. But why? Because they do not love the God of Lazarus, and are destitute of faith in Jesus Christ; because they are ignorant of the consolations of true religion. It is well when the poor and afflicted are led to seek the true riches, and the healing of the disease of sin, the most fatal of all diseases. Happy are those poor people who are heirs of that kingdom which Lazarus obtained, and which is promised to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Neither should my young reader imagine, that the rich man was unhappy in this world, and miserable in the world of spirits, *because* he had wealth. There are rich men who are good men, and who are happy here, and will be happy hereafter. It was because the rich man fixed his heart on the enjoyments and gratifications which wealth enabled him to obtain, and neglected his soul. Because he lived only to himself, and forgot the two great commandments—love to God, and love to man. He lived as if he were only made for this world, and not for another; and it is to be feared, steeled his heart against the wants and wretchedness of his fellow creatures. He was, in short, an unbeliever, or destitute of Abraham's faith; and therefore, when he died, his spirit could not go to dwell where the patriarch dwelt.

We are told that the rich man lifted up his eyes in hell, "being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom." This must have been a great addition to his wretchedness. He was not only in the place of misery, enduring that punishment which the justice of God inflicted on him for his sins, but he saw the seat and company of the blessed in heaven, though at a great distance from him. He beheld also the very man whom perhaps he had neglected and despised, placed in a station of honour, safety, and joy, near the father of the faithful; while he was shut out of that

company, and compelled to endure the upbraidings of his conscience, and the wrath of an offended God. Of what avail to him now were all the possessions he once enjoyed? They could not procure for him even a drop of water to cool his tongue. He was now in that eternal world where no distinction is known, but that which exists between the righteous and the wicked. He was aware of this, but it was too late to be of any use. He knew that God's mercy could not now be extended to him, for he had rejected it while on earth; and he vainly addressed Abraham, saying, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." He here speaks as if he thought Abraham was more merciful than God; and was able and willing to help those whom God was punishing. He calls Abraham "father:" and certainly if he was a Jew, he was related by descent to that good man. Now the Jews were accustomed to think, that on account of their being the descendants of the patriarch, they should be saved. But, in this passage, we see how vain and wicked such an opinion was. No Jew could be saved, unless he had the *faith* of his father Abraham, Rom. iv. 11—13.

Perhaps, my young reader, you have a pious father and mother. They will no doubt instruct you in those things that belong to your everlasting peace. They will point out to you the way to heaven, and they may entreat you to walk therein. But do not deceive yourself by supposing that *because they are good people*, you will get to heaven as well as they. No; instead of this, it will be far worse for you in another world, that you had religious parents, and yet you refused to obey their instructions, and to imitate their example. Your heart must be changed, you must believe in Jesus Christ, you must take pleasure in doing God's will on earth, or you can have no well-grounded hope of dwelling with your parents in heaven.

This wretched man did not expect that Abraham

could deliver him out of the place of torment, or indeed give him any effectual relief. All he requested, was a momentary alleviation of his agony, a very small abatement of his exquisite misery. But even this he could not obtain.

Abraham acknowledged the relationship between them—that he was his son according to the flesh; but he gave him no reason to expect even a momentary relief. On the contrary, he told him that during the time he had lived in this world he had received *his* good things. The good things *he* sought were riches, sensual pleasures, and the pride of life, in preference to the favour and image of God, and heavenly happiness. He *had* obtained the things which his heart desired, and he *had* spent all his portion. He must not therefore expect any more good. Nay: he must expect to suffer for the foolish choice he had made. In like manner, Lazarus had received his evil things. He had, however, feared sin and the wrath of God, more than pain and poverty. He had chosen sanctified affliction, rather than prosperity without God. He had endured his afflictions patiently, and he had profited by them. They were now ended, and he was now comforted in the presence of God, and in the company of the redeemed. He could suffer no more pain or sorrow, for he was now in heaven.

To make the answer still more fearful, Abraham assured him, that there was a great gulf, or *chasm*, fixed between the places of happiness and misery; so that if an inhabitant of heaven wished to relieve any one in the place of torment, he would be unable to approach him; and it would be equally impossible for a condemned sinner to leave the prison-house, and enter the realms of happiness. Both were fixed in their different states, by the unchangeable decrees of God. No hope whatever was held out, of any deliverance from the place of woe. The misery would be eternal.

When the rich man found that there was no hope of obtaining even a temporary mitigation of his torture,

he was desirous that it should not be *increased*. He knew that there was a passage open between heaven and earth, though not between heaven and hell. He therefore requested Abraham to send Lazarus to his five brethren, to testify unto them, lest they also should come into the place of torment.

It appears from this, that while their brother was suffering misery in hell, they were living in luxury and magnificence, as he had done while on earth, and were also on their way to the same place of torment. The poor despairing wretch wished Lazarus to go and tell them of the realities of the invisible world, and to what a dreadful condition his sins had brought him; to warn them of the danger of treading in his steps, and to excite them to repentance, that they might escape the wrath to come. He was afraid that if they came to the place of torment, their presence would increase his misery. Conscious that he had deeply injured them by his example, and by making them his companions in sin, he feared their reproaches. It was therefore a wish to escape greater wretchedness, and no feeling of love or natural affection, that urged him to make the request. There is no affection in hell.

It is very probable that the rich man was but young when he died. His five brethren are represented as all living in their father's house, as joint-heirs of the estate. He had, however, though young, committed many sins, and done much harm by an evil example.

My young reader has also done evil, he has sinned against God; he has also, as far as his influence extended, injured others by his example; and it is possible that he has himself been injured by the same evil. It may be, that some one of your youthful companions, with whom you have committed many sins, has gone before you to the world of spirits; and if he died with an unrenewed heart, he has gone to the place of torment. If he knew your present situation, and that you were going on in the same evil courses, into which he led you at first, oh, how desirous would he be that

you should turn to God ! If permitted, he could tell you the agonies he is enduring, and the despair that fills his bosom, and entreat you to act differently, lest you also go to the same place, and increase his misery by your upbraidings. This he is not permitted to tell you, but the Saviour has condescended to make known the same truths, by means of this parable ; nay more, he commands you in his word to return unto him, and live. This rich man was told by Abraham, that his brethren had Moses and the prophets, and that they should hear them. He thought, however, if one whom they knew should visit them from the world of spirits, they would be so convinced that they would repent. But he was assured by the patriarch, that if they would not hear Moses and the prophets, neither would this persuade them to turn to God. They might be affrighted and amazed, and for a time refrain from gross sins ; but though this were done, it would not constrain them to hate their sins, to humble themselves before God, to trust in his mercy, and devote themselves to his service.

Perhaps you may have sometimes thought, that if one of your former companions were to visit you from the world of spirits, and tell you what was going on there, it would convince you of the reality of spiritual and eternal things, and compel you to lay them to heart. But this is a mistake ; if you saw the apparition of such a one, and heard a communication from him, it would terrify you for a time, it would fill you with many alarms ; but it would not convince you of your folly, or convert you to the faith of Christ. In the days of the Son of God, even his stupendous miracles were insufficient to lead the Jews to acknowledge Jesus to be the true Messiah. Many saw another Lazarus, John xi., rise from the dead, and yet continued in unbelief. Thus they had Moses and the prophets, and the additional evidence of one rising from the dead, and yet they would not be persuaded.

You, my young reader, possess not only Moses and

the prophets, but also the New Testament. If, then, those who lived in the days of Christ were without excuse, if they did not read, understand, and obey the Old Testament; how much more criminal must your conduct be, if you will not read, understand, and obey the whole book of God! The language is plain, and the truths are simple. You are told that you are sinners, and you know it. You are informed, that by the deeds of the law no one can be justified in the sight of God; that God sent his Son into the world to save sinners; that there is salvation in no other; that if you believe in him you shall be saved, and that if you believe not you shall be condemned. The rich man was condemned to endless misery, because he did not attend to these concerns; and if you, whether you be rich or poor, should neglect this great salvation, you shall not escape the wrath to come. How sad, how wicked, and how foolish is it, for the young to refuse the blessings of the gospel, when they are offered without money and without price! Oh take care, and do not continue in that path of sin and unbelief which leads to hell, where the mercy of God, boundless as it is, is never shown, where misery and darkness for ever dwell. Would you escape all these evils? seek to possess the faith of Lazarus, believe in Jesus Christ, and show by a preference for the things of God, that you love them, that you prefer the happiness of the soul to that of the body, and that eternal life at God's right hand is more highly valued by you than all the pleasures of time and sense.





THE PARABLE OF THE UNFAITHFUL STEWARD.

LUKE XVI. 1—8.

A STEWARD is a person who has charge of the property of another, and whose business it is to manage and take care of it for the owner. A gentleman who has great possessions may commit them to the care of a steward, in order to save himself trouble. He may trust so much to the steward's honesty and prudence, that he will not be always watching, or inquiring into his conduct. But he will certainly give directions as to the way in which he wishes his property to be disposed of; and the steward ought not to act, in any matter, contrary to those directions. Though he may seem to have all his master's property in his power, he has no right to employ any part of it for his own use; and he will be greatly to blame if he allows it to be wasted and lost, or does not improve it by every means in his power. A

steward is also set over the other servants, not only to see that they do their work properly, but also to take care that they have their food, and every thing else that is necessary for them.

"There was a certain rich man which had a steward." The rich man is intended to mean God, who is the great Proprietor of all things. All men are stewards to him; they have nothing of their own; for naked came they into this world, and whatever they enjoy they have received from God.* He does not give people money, or learning, or any thing else, merely that they may use it for their own pleasure, but that they may lay it out for his glory, and the good of others. And, in the Bible, he has given abundant directions as to the way in which his stewards are to use the property committed to them. There is, however, one great difference between the Lord of heaven and earth and the rich men of this world. They employ stewards for their own convenience; or, indeed, they may be obliged to do it, because their possessions are so large that they could not possibly attend to them themselves. But God does not *need* the services of any of his creatures. It is great condescension in him to employ them; and though it is their duty to serve him, yet all that he requires them to do is for their own benefit, as much as for his glory.

The rich man was informed that his steward had "wasted his goods." "And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward." There is no person who has at all times improved every gift of God so much as he might and ought to have done. And there are many who may truly be said to have "wasted his goods." Whatever is not spent with the desire and intention of serving God, and according to the directions of his word, is wasted. Perhaps the steward mentioned in the parable hoped that his master would never find out his misconduct.

* See Explanation of the Parable of the Talents.

And so people are apt to imagine that God does not notice their behaviour. Or, they may even be so wicked as to say, that what they have is their own, and that none can deprive them of it. But though God may long have patience with them, yet the Bible tells them that they shall soon be called to give an account of their stewardship, when they must be no longer stewards. When they die, every thing they possess will be taken from them; and they must stand before God, to give an account to him of all the mercies that he bestowed upon them.

The steward had no excuse to make for himself. He did not even ask his lord to allow him to continue in his situation, or promise to be better for the time to come. But he immediately set himself to consider what would become of him when his lord turned him away. He knew that he would be obliged to find some other way of earning his bread, and he found it difficult to contrive *how* he might do so. He had never been accustomed to hard work; he could not dig. He had long lived in comfort and plenty, so that he was ashamed to beg. At last, he thought of a plan which seemed to him the best, and he lost no time in putting it in practice.

There were several persons who were in debt to his lord. Probably no one besides the steward and themselves knew how much each of them owed. He persuaded them to make out a false account of their debts, so as to cheat his lord, while it saved them from having so much to pay as they ought to have done. He thought they would feel so much obliged to him for this, that they would willingly allow him to live with them after his lord turned him away. Or, even if they should not be *willing* to do so, he thought they would be afraid to refuse him any thing he asked, for fear he should tell his lord how they had cheated him. At the same time he was not afraid of their informing against him, because they could not do so without bringing trouble on themselves.

But however cunning wicked people may be, and whatever care they may take to conceal their wickedness, it will often be found out. And so it happened to the steward, and to his lord's debtors. Somehow or other their conduct was detected. "And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely." The rich man could not possibly think that the steward had done *right*; he had better have worked ever so hard, and lived on bread and water, than be so dishonest. But it was his worldly *wisdom* that his lord noticed, in contriving so likely a way to obtain what he wished. He wished to live in idleness, and yet in plenty, and it seemed as if he had taken the surest way to be able to do so. Observe, he showed no wisdom in choosing a life of idleness; but he did show worldly wisdom in the scheme he contrived to answer his own purposes.

"For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." "The children of this world" are those who desire nothing beyond what this world can give them. "The children of light" are those whom God has taught to see that his favour and eternal life in heaven are far more desirable than all the riches and pleasures of this world. And the great lesson which the Saviour designed to teach by this parable is, that the children of this world often take much greater pains to obtain what they desire, though they must soon lose it all, than the children of light take to secure their heavenly inheritance. People will rise early and sit up late, and toil very hard, in order to obtain what they have set their hearts on. They may be disappointed of obtaining it; and even if they are not, in a few years at most they must part with what they took so much trouble to procure. While those who say that they desire to have heaven as their inheritance, which they could never lose, are often very indolent in seeking after it.

My readers may, perhaps, think that this parable is intended only for grown people; but the youngest child

that reads it may learn several lessons from the unfaithful steward. There is one of these lessons, in particular, which I wish to set before you. You have been told that you must die, that you must leave this world to return to it no more. Now, have you acted as wisely as he did? have you made it your chief concern to secure an everlasting home? If you have not, then wicked as the steward was, he was wiser than you.

Few young persons like to think of death, or to hear it mentioned. But your not liking to think of it will not delay it for a moment. Probably the rich man told the steward on what day he would dismiss him. But "ye know neither the day, nor the hour, wherein the Son of man cometh." If God were now to speak to you, he might say, "This night thy soul shall be required of thee." The very thought of this makes you feel sad; and if you were assured that it really would be so, how would you tremble! Oh you might well tremble, to think of leaving your dear friends, and all that delights you most, and going, naked and alone, into a world that is all dark and unknown to you!

Why, then, remain for a moment in such a state of dread and alarm? The steward committed great wickedness to procure friends, who, after all, could do but little for him. But there is an Almighty Friend, waiting to be gracious to you. He invites you to come to him, "without money, and without price." Hear what he says to all who believe and trust in him: "In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you," John xiv. 2. And when the thief upon the cross said to him, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom;" he answered, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise," Luke xxiii. 42, 43. Even though you were not called to die, and leave this world, you could never be completely happy here, for this is a world of sin and sorrow. But in heaven there is no more grief, "neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain," Rev. xxi. 4. And if you had Jesus for your friend, you need not

fear to venture into an unknown state; for he would be waiting to receive you, and through eternity you would live in his presence, and enjoy his love. One reason why you are afraid to die is, because you know there is, "after death, the judgment." You are terrified to think of giving an account of your stewardship, because you have wasted your Lord's goods. But only seek the friendship of the blessed Saviour, and he will answer all the claims that God has against you. If any kind friend had appeared, to repay to the rich man all that the steward had wasted, perhaps he would not have dismissed him. Now, Jesus Christ hath "restored that which he took not away;" and if he becomes your friend, God will never require you to pay what his Son has paid already.

Again, let me beg of you to imitate the steward, in immediately securing a home, to which you may go when you leave your present one. To prepare immediately for death, would not make you die any sooner; but to know that Jesus was your friend, and heaven your eternal home, would make the thought of death delightful. Instead of fearing it, you would have "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better." If sickness and pain should wear out your feeble bodies, you can then rejoice, and say, "For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." When the wicked die, they are said to be "driven away in their wickedness;" but even a child who loves the Saviour may say, in the hour of death, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation!"





THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND
THE PUBLICAN.

LUKE XVIII. 9—14.

PART I.

JESUS "spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." It was once remarked by some of the Saviour's hearers, "Never man spake like this man:" and never man had a *right* to speak like him. No other preacher can see the hearts, and know the thoughts of those who hear him; and it would be very wrong for him to say that any of them "trusted in themselves that they were righteous," except they showed it by their conduct. And if this be the case with preachers, still more is it true of those who *write* for the instruction of others. I do not ask my readers to try to discover what their parents and teachers think of them; but I do ask them seriously to try to discover what He thinks of them, who searches their hearts, and knows their secret thoughts; and whether, if they had been present, the Saviour

would have spoken this parable to them. Some may think that this would be very difficult; but they may perhaps find it easier than they suppose, if they will attend to me, while I try to explain the parable; because the description which it gives of the Pharisee's language is intended to describe the feelings of all persons, whether old or young, who "trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others."

The "two men," who "went up into the temple to pray," were "a Pharisee" and "a publican." The two classes of persons to which they belonged have been already described. See p. 86; see also Matt. xxiii. 23, 27, 28; Luke xi. 42—44.

"The Pharisee stood and prayed;" that is, he thought he was praying, or at least, he wished others to think so; but the words he used are not at all like a prayer. In the Bible we read many prayers of good men, and we find them confess that they are sinners, and ask mercies from God: see Psa. li.; cxliii. 1, 2, 10; Dan. ix. 1—20. But the Pharisee seemed to think that he had no sins to be forgiven, and that there was no mercy which he needed. He began by saying, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are." These words would have been very proper if he had used them with a right meaning. If he had meant to say, "O God, I thank thee that thou hast kept me from being so wicked as many others, for I know that I should have been as bad as they, if thy goodness had not prevented me." This would have been quite proper. But he took all the praise to himself. He went on to mention some of the most wicked people he could think of, and among the rest, the poor publican: and he boasted before God that he was not like them. He forgot that his heart was by nature no better than theirs; and that, if he had been in their situation, he would very likely have acted exactly as they did. God had commanded many sacrifices to be offered on account of sin, Lev. iv.; xvi. 2—28, and these were all intended to point out that one great sacrifice which the Saviour was to offer when he

laid down his life, Heb. ix. 6—14; x. 1—4; they were meant to teach the people that God could not be pleased with them, or with their prayers, unless they were trusting in the blood of Christ to wash their sins away. But there was not a word of this in the Pharisee's prayer. It seemed as if he thought God could see no fault in him; nay, he went on to mention some things he did which he thought were so good that they certainly deserved to be rewarded.

Now, my youthful readers, I do not think it very likely that you ever prayed as the Pharisee did; but yet I fear that some of you may have had thoughts and feelings much the same as his. Perhaps you are accustomed, every evening, to repeat a prayer which you have been taught, in which you say, "O, pardon every one of my faults, and be not angry with me;" or something to the same purpose. Now when you say such words as these, do you feel ashamed and grieved that you should have offended God so many times through the day? and are you really desirous that he should forgive you? or, do you say such words only because they happen to be in the prayer that you have learned? And if any one should ask you what faults you have committed, would you not sometimes answer that you did not know of any? that you had been attentive to your lessons at school, and obedient to your parents at home, and now you had said your prayers, and were going to bed like good children, and surely no one could find any fault with you?

Perhaps you have been present when your teacher has reproved and punished one of your schoolfellows for telling a lie. When this was the case, did you feel very sorry for that poor boy or girl that had been so naughty; and did you thank God in your heart that he had preserved you from deserving the name of a liar; while, at the same time, you remembered with shame, that you had been guilty of many other sins which were quite as bad as lying? Or, did you turn first to your offending schoolfellow, and then to your teacher, with

a toss of the head, and a proud look, which seemed to say, "Ah! *I* never got into such disgrace as this; I'm sure *I* deserve praise, for I have never told a lie yet, since I have been to the school."

Perhaps you have been commended for your attention to the sermons which you hear, and for being able to give a good account of them when you return home. But do you listen so attentively because you feel that you are a sinner against God, and are thankful to hear that he so loved sinners as to give up his own dear Son to die for them? Or, have you not rather had feelings somewhat like the following:—When you have heard a minister speak of the great danger of those who have sinned against God, and say that nothing but the blood of Christ can take away their guilt, have you not thought that he must be speaking of older people than you? or of those young people who spend the sabbath in idleness or amusement, and who do not even say their prayers morning and evening? When the preacher has said how necessary it is to repent of sin, and earnestly to seek forgiveness from God, have you not sometimes looked at one of your companions, and thought, "Ah! I am sure he has need to repent; I heard him swear three or four times the last day I played with him?" or, "There's Mary——; she may well be afraid that God will not forgive her; it was only yesterday that I heard her refuse to do what her mother desired her?" But you think that repentance, and forgiveness, and such things, are what do not concern you at all.

Now, have any of my readers begun to find out that they too much resemble the proud Pharisee? Then, my dear young friends, attend seriously to what the Saviour says respecting him. He says, "I tell you, this man," that is, the publican, "went down to his house justified rather than the other." The meaning is, that the Pharisee, with all his good opinion of himself, and all the respect and admiration which he might obtain from other men, was not approved or beloved by

God. Probably it is very true that he was neither an "extortioner, nor unjust, nor an adulterer;" but he was a proud man, and his pride was what prevented him from being justified. "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased." "God resisteth the proud." "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." He went to the temple and prayed, and returned home again, but we cannot suppose that he felt comfortable or happy in his own mind; for it is quite impossible for any one to be truly happy without the favour of God.

And I am certain that you are not happy while your minds are filled with proud thoughts. If you are always wishing and expecting to be praised, you will be very often disappointed. If there is pride in your hearts, it will show itself in your behaviour, even though you may fancy that no one observes it. When your teacher, or other friends see it, it will keep them from praising you, even when you might otherwise deserve it; and even your companions will dislike you. You will be constantly getting vexed and affronted by things that would not give you the least uneasiness if you were modest, humble children.

But, if it should so happen that you get as much praise as you desire, and that you should be loved and esteemed by all who know you, still, I say it again, you cannot be happy. You must be sometimes alone, and you will find it very tiresome, for you cannot enjoy the presence of God, or have any pleasure in thinking of that Saviour who "is a friend that loveth at all times." You may now be strong and well, but you cannot tell how soon sickness may come upon you. If you were tossing on your beds full of pain, would it give you any comfort to think of the good opinion that others had of you? And if your weeping father or mother should be obliged to tell you that the doctor could do you no good, and that you were getting worse, oh how could you bear to think of your soul appearing before Him who knows all your proud thoughts!

But there have been many persons, both old and young, who have not only lived, but even died, thinking that they certainly deserved to go to heaven for their good conduct, and because they were better than others. And this may be *your* case. If you will still continue to think highly of yourselves, your pride may so increase, and your hearts may be so hardened, that even the prospect of death may not alarm you. But oh, it is an awful thing thus to go down to the grave with "a lie in your right hand!" You may "exalt yourselves" to the very last; but how fearfully will you "be abased," when God shall bring you into judgment! Instead of humbly trusting in Jesus Christ, as an all-sufficient Saviour, you trusted in your own good behaviour; but when that behaviour, which you thought so good, comes to be examined by the Judge of all, it will cover you with everlasting confusion.

PART II.

BUT we must now attend to the prayer of the publican. Unlike the Pharisee, who probably stood in the most honourable part of the temple, he stood "afar off." He was ashamed to go near any other person who was there, for he thought no one was so wicked as himself. He felt himself to be such a sinner in the sight of God, that he was afraid even to lift up his eyes, to look towards heaven. He was so sorrowful on account of his sins, and so unhappy at the thought of having offended his Maker, that his heart was ready to break. He did not make any excuse for his past conduct; he did not compare himself with others who might have acted more wickedly than himself; he did not satisfy himself with promising to do better for the time to come; in the greatness of his distress, he "smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." His prayer was very short; perhaps his grief was so great that he could say no more; or perhaps he thought a longer

prayer from a sinner like him would only be displeasing to God. But though it is so short, it means a great deal. He confesses that he is a sinner; he entreats that God would be merciful to him; and, greatly as he is humbled and ashamed, he is not quite without hope of obtaining mercy, or he would not have gone to the temple at all.

As I said before, I cannot see my youthful readers; but, if I could, perhaps I might find one of them sitting alone in some quiet corner, with a sorrowful countenance, and the big tears starting from his or her eyes. And if it were further possible for me to sit down by that little mourner, and to ask the reason of this sorrow, perhaps I should get an answer somewhat like the following:—"Oh I am a sad naughty child! My kind father and mother have often told me that I should pray to the great God, and for fear I should not know what to say, they have taught me prayers which I might repeat. But, in the morning, I have been in such a hurry to get to my play, that I have often gone down stairs without ever thinking of my prayers; and, at night, when I was tired, or the room was cold, I have got into bed without so much as going on my knees. I have disobeyed my parents so often, that they tell me their hearts are almost broken. At school, I have been so careless that I scarcely know any thing more than I did when I first went. I have told a great many lies; and, though some of them have been found out, and punished, there are far more than any one knows, but myself; but I know that God

'A book of reckoning keeps,
For every lie that children tell.'

I have done many other things that I knew were wrong. I have sometimes tried to repent, and resolved that I would be naughty no more, but the very next time that I was bid do any thing I did not like, I was disobedient again; and then, if I could hide it by telling a lie, my good resolutions were all forgotten. Surely

there is not one of my schoolfellows so naughty as I am. I have been told that God is willing to forgive the greatest sinners, but I am afraid and ashamed to ask him to forgive me. I have been trying to do it; but oh, do you think it is really possible that so wicked a child as I am can be saved?"

The best reply that I could make would be, to point to the Saviour's words about the publican: "I tell you this man went down to his house justified;" that is, God forgave him all his sins, and looked upon him with as much kindness as if he had never offended him. The Saviour further adds, "Every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted." This does not mean that because the publican was humbled he deserved to be justified; for people should never imagine that because they are sorry for their sins, they have a right to expect that they will be forgiven. But if the publican had not been humbled he would not have "smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner;" and none but humble persons ever will say so in earnestness and sincerity.

To you, my young friend, whose feelings seem to resemble those of the publican, I must say, that much as you are grieved and ashamed, still you are not so much so as you ought to be. You confess many of your faults; but if you should try to tell them all, they would be more in number than you could possibly count. You are sensible that you have done wrong in sinning against the God of love; but oh, if you could see the evil of it as he sees it, you would be overwhelmed with confusion. You would be ready to say, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night!" And although you should do this as long as you live, it would not make up for one of the sins you have committed.

But you may dry up your tears, for the Bible contains "glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all* people;" and to you in particular they must be glad indeed. "God so loved the world, that he gave his

only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. Observe, it is said, *whosoever*; even lying and disobedient children are welcome. Jesus Christ shed his precious blood upon the cross: floods of tears could not wash out the stain of one transgression; but "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin." God has said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die;" but Jesus Christ died instead of the souls that had sinned; he suffered the punishment which they deserved. "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." And though he is now in heaven, seated at the right hand of God, yet he sees and notices even a sinful child like you.

Believe, then, what the Bible tells you respecting him; trust in him alone to deliver you from all your guilt and misery; commit yourself entirely into his hands, as a ruined helpless sinner, and he will not cast you out. This is the way, and the only way, in which you can be "justified;" God will then no longer be angry with you for your sins, because he laid all his anger upon his beloved Son. You will still have much reason to be humbled and ashamed; indeed, you will feel more humbled than ever: but when you pray to the great God, instead of being afraid, you will rejoice that you are speaking to a kind and tender Father.

You will then no longer make good resolutions in your own strength, which would be broken as before; but you will continually look unto Jesus, to enable you to do what is right. You will love him, and this will make you hate and avoid every thing that is displeasing to him. Those duties, which once were a burden and a task to you, will then be a pleasure; and even when your parents or teachers may desire you to do something that does not suit your inclination, you will feel a delight in doing it, because you know it is your Saviour's will that you should "obey them that rule over you."

The thought of death will not then alarm you; for

you will know that your best Friend, he whom you love better than the dearest friends on earth, will be ready to receive your soul to himself the moment that it leaves the body. You will not be afraid of the judgment-day, for you will expect to stand at the right hand of the Judge, and to hear him say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." You will think with delight of heaven, as the place where you are to dwell for ever, free from sin and sorrow, and in the presence of your beloved Saviour.

But I cannot possibly describe to you the happiness of those who are justified by believing in Jesus. Only be persuaded to try; to "taste and see;" and you will say, as the queen of Sheba said, that "the half has not been told you."





THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER AND
THE LABOURERS.

MATTHEW XX. 1—16.

THIS is a parable which I think all my young readers can easily understand. A householder, when spoken of in the Bible, generally means a person who not only had a house, but some land and other property of his own. It is the custom, in many places, for people who want out-door work, to go and stand in the market-place to be hired; and this householder went there early in the morning, to hire labourers to work in his vineyard. A vineyard is a kind of garden; a place where grapes grow. The householder promised to give the labourers a penny a-day. You may think that was very small wages, but the penny that was used in that country was as much as eightpence of our money. He went out again about nine o'clock, at twelve, at three, and about five in the afternoon: and every time he hired some

whom he found idle. He did not say how much he would give them, but only that they should have what was right. In the evening he ordered his steward to pay the labourers, and to begin with those who had been hired last. The steward did so, and gave the same wages to every one of them. Those that had worked all day began to grumble at this; for they thought, that if those who had only been an hour in the vineyard received a penny, they themselves should have had more. But the householder told them, that it was wrong for them to be discontented, because they had agreed to work for a penny a-day, which was then the common rate of wages. Certainly the others had not any right to expect a full day's wages; it was his kindness that made him give them so much; but the money was his own, and no one ought to find fault with him for using it as he pleased.

You know that God is the great Master of this world, and of all things that are in it. He orders every thing as he pleases, and he never does any thing but what is right. If you see other children who have better clothes, or a pleasanter house to live in, or kinder friends than you, you should not be discontented, or think that God deals hardly with you. Remember, that neither you nor they deserve any good thing at all; whatever comforts you have, you receive from the kindness of God; these things all belong to him, and certainly he has a good right to divide them as he pleases.

When different hours of the day are spoken of, it is sometimes intended to mean different times of life. While people are young, they are in the morning of life. It is still "early in the morning" with you children; and God is inviting you to work for him, as the householder did the labourers. Perhaps you may say, "What work is there that *we* can do for God?" There were some people who once put this very question to our Saviour while he was upon earth. They said, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" and the Saviour answered, "This is the work of God, that

ye believe on him whom he hath sent." This is the first thing that God calls upon you to do ; and, until you do so, you will neither have any real desire to serve God, nor yet could he be pleased with your services. But if once you really believe that " God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ;" and that Jesus Christ so loved poor sinners, as to die upon the cross for them ; and that if it had not been for this wonderful kindness, we must have all been miserable for ever ; I say, if you really believe these things, you will love God so much, that it will be your greatest pleasure to serve him. The Bible contains sufficient directions as to what he requires his servants to do ; and these directions are so plain and easy, that the youngest child who reads this may understand them.

Perhaps you think that you have many years to live ; you may be mistaken ; but if you should live long, you will never be sorry that you began to serve God when you were young. He is a kind and tender Father, as well as a Master, to his servants. He never lets them want any thing that is good for them ; and whatever he bids them do, is for their own happiness. David was a servant of God, and he said, " In keeping of thy commandments there is great reward," Psalm xix. 11. God does what the best earthly master cannot do, for he gives his servants strength to do their work. If they should sometimes be weary with bearing " the burden and heat of the day, he encourages them to go on till they have accomplished, as an hireling, their day ; and tells them, that then they shall enjoy the " rest " which " remaineth " in heaven for them. Instead of being afraid to think of death, they expect it with as much pleasure as the labourer does the evening, when he will be allowed to leave his work, and receive his wages.

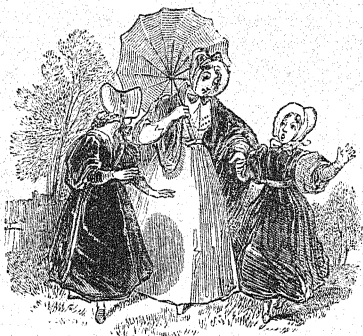
The servants of God know, that all they can do will not *deserve* heaven ; they cannot *demand* heaven, as a labourer can demand the wages he has worked for. But

Jesus Christ, who by his death saved them from hell, also, by his life of obedience to all the law of God, obtained for them the happiness of heaven. Suppose that a friend had done a great deal for you; shown you so much kindness that you thought you could never do enough for him in return; you would watch for every opportunity of doing whatever you could for him, and would be delighted if he would employ you in any way. You would never expect to be *paid* for what you did, when you were only showing how thankful you felt for what he had done for you before; but your friend might be so very kind as to say, that he would still give you something more as a *reward* for your services. Now, this will help you to understand how it is that God's servants expect heaven. They expect it entirely on account of what Christ has done; but they are diligent in serving God, because they are so thankful to him for giving his Son to die for them, that they think they can never do enough to show their love to him. And God, their gracious Master, has promised that every good work, which is thus done for love and thankfulness, shall be rewarded at last.

You remember, that there are some mentioned in the parable, who remained idle all the day. But those who do not begin to serve God in their youth, are worse than idle; they are busily serving Satan. He is a cruel, hard-hearted master. If you will read the account that is given of the way that the Egyptians used the Israelites, Exod. i. 11, 13, 14; v.; you will see treatment something like that which Satan gives to his servants. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked. The way of transgressors is hard: destruction and misery are in their ways, and the way of peace have they not known," Isa. lvii. 21; Prov. xiii. 15; Rom. iii. 16, 17. These are the descriptions which the Bible gives of Satan's service. Instead of having any reward, to which they can look forward with pleasure, his servants know that "the wages of sin is death;" that is, not only the death of the body, but the everlasting

misery of the soul. If they serve Satan all their lives, they must expect to dwell with him for ever.

It is true, that the householder went out several times through the day to hire labourers, and once even so late as five in the afternoon. This is to teach us, that as long as people remain in this world, it is never too late for them to begin to serve God. He is willing to receive even those aged people who have spent all their strength in doing Satan's work, and who are no longer able to do any thing. But there are very few persons who do thus return to God in old age. It is very kind of him to invite them; but this is no reason why you should delay, and refuse to become his servants now. If you feel unwilling to serve him while you are young, you will be still less likely to desire it if you live to be old: and remember, you will not be able to say, like the labourers who were standing idle, "No man hath hired us;" for you have been often invited to enter the service of God: and now, once more, I would say to you, "O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed are all they that trust in him."



THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER WHO PLANTED A VINEYARD.

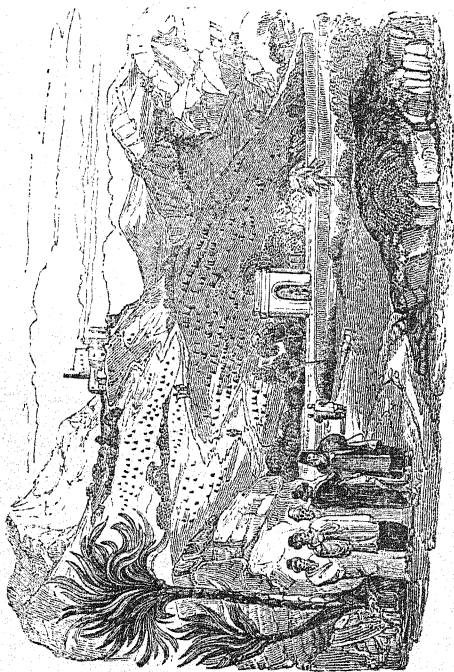
MATTHEW XXI. 33—46.

"THERE was a certain householder which planted a vineyard;" that is, he formed a garden, and planted vines in it. "He hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press in it." The wine-press was a place made for the grapes to be put into when they were ripe; and where they were trampled, in order to squeeze the juice out of them; for it is of the juice that wine is made. The "tower" which the householder built was for the husbandmen to live in; or, if they did not live in it, one or more of them probably remained in it during the night, in order to watch the vineyard. The householder "let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country."

"And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it." The vineyard was the property of the householder; he had only let it out to husbandmen, that they might cultivate and take care of it. Certainly, he had a good right to the fruits which grew in it; but instead of sending these things to him, the husbandmen beat, stoned, and killed the servants whom he sent to receive them.

It appears that he had only one son, and he, at length, sent him to the husbandmen. But the husbandmen "said among themselves, This is the heir;" they considered that the vineyard would be his at his father's death. They, therefore, "caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him;" thinking that then they should enjoy the vineyard as their own.

The vineyard is intended to mean the nation of the Jews. God had chosen them of all the nations of the earth, to be his own people. He had planted, or placed



A JEWISH VINEYARD.

them in the land of Canaan. He had given them his own word; a temple where his worship was to be continually carried on; and had promised to protect and bless them at all times, while they continued obedient to him. God had done all this, on purpose that they might be fruitful in good works; that is, diligent in attending to every duty that he had commanded. The priests and rulers of the Jews were like the husbandmen; it was their business to watch over all the people, and particularly to see that they obeyed and worshipped God. He had especially appointed them to maintain his own worship, and to punish and prevent the worshipping of idols. When God at first brought the people of the Jews out of Egypt, and brought them into the land of Canaan, he wrought many great wonders among them. He divided the Red Sea, so that they walked across as on dry ground, Exod. xiv. 15—31. He went continually before them, by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire, Psa. lxxviii. 14. When he gave them his law on Mount Sinai, he came down with thunders, and lightnings, and the sound of a trumpet, Exod. xix. 16—20. When the people came to the river Jordan, which they must cross before they could enter Canaan, God again divided the waters before them: see Josh. iii. 14—17. And many other wonders he performed for them: see Josh. vi.; x. 12—14, etc. But as the householder went into a far country, so, after the Jews were settled in Canaan, God no longer saw it necessary to give them those more remarkable displays of his power, and proofs of his presence. And they soon "forgot his works, and his wonders that he had showed them." The people, in general, were continually falling into the worship of idols, and too many of their kings and priests, instead of trying to prevent this, encouraged them in it, and set them the example. The word of God was neglected, his law was not obeyed; and, at length, there were very few in the land who had any true religion. Those who should have acted as the

husbandmen of God's vineyard, studied only to please themselves; and used the power and riches which were committed to them for their own evil purposes.

God sent many of his servants to them, to call upon them to bring forth the fruits that he demanded. These holy men were called prophets; they told them of that Saviour who was to come, and of the happiness they would enjoy, if they would only serve God. They also reminded them how much he had done for them already, and that all they had belonged to him. But, instead of attending to the prophets, who spoke to them as the servants of God, or repenting of their wickedness, they used many of them as the husbandmen did the servants of the householder. And the great men of the land were generally foremost in such conduct.

At length God had sent his only-begotten and well-beloved Son, to tell them more plainly than ever what was his will; to warn them of the judgments that should come upon them, if they continued to rebel; and to declare his mercy and readiness to forgive all who should repent and turn to him. But the Jews, and their rulers in particular, treated him even worse than the prophets who had come before him. They paid no regard to his warnings and instructions; and, at last, they sent men to seize on him, drove him out of the city of Jerusalem, and nailed him to the cross. There were indeed some persons, called his disciples, who loved him, and believed his words; but these were very few in number. It was to some of the priests and rulers that Jesus spoke this parable. He knew that they were contriving how they might put him to death, and that, in a very short time after, they would do so.

He asked them what they thought the Lord of the vineyard would do to the wicked husbandmen. "They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons." The priests and rulers could see at once that it was foolish,

as well as wicked, for the husbandmen to act as they did; it was certainly very absurd in them to expect that they should be allowed to keep the vineyard, after having killed their lord's only son. But though they answered so readily to the Saviour's question about the householder, they did not see that they themselves were acting quite as foolishly as the husbandmen had done.

The Saviour added, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." "The kingdom of God" here means, the word and the worship of God, his favour and presence, and all the means of religious instruction which the Jews had enjoyed. And very soon after they had put the Saviour to death, all these *were* taken from them. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, and the Jews were scattered all over the world, without any to instruct them. The word of God was carried, by good men, to those countries where it had not before been known. And in all those countries, there were multitudes who gladly listened to it, and brought forth fruit to God, by doing his will.

Now, my youthful readers, I dare say you think that the Jews, with their rulers, acted very foolishly, and that God punished them no more than they deserved. But let me remind you, that you have even more and greater advantages than they had; and, if you do not render the fruits in their season, God can as easily take away your opportunities of religious instruction as he did theirs. You may become sick or lame, and unable to go out of the house. Your pious parents or teachers may be removed by death, and you may be left with no one to care for your souls. Or, you may remove to some distant place, where you will hear nothing about the way of salvation. Perhaps you are accustomed to trifle with instruction, or to think, "What a weariness is it!" But would you trifle, if you were sure that you were hearing the *last* sermon you should ever hear? if you knew that your affectionate parents were addressing you for

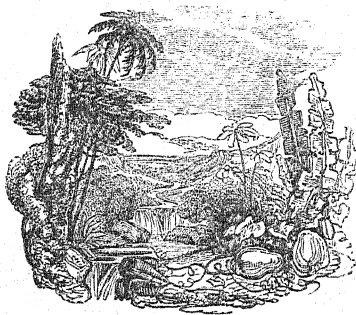
the *last* time? Yet you can never be sure that such is not the case. Nay, even now, while you are reading this little book, it may be the *last* time that your attention shall ever be called to Divine things.

You have heard of the poor heathen children, who are taught to kneel down and pray to stocks and stones, and to do a great many other wicked things. But you have also heard, that some good men have gone to tell them, and their parents too, about "the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." Some of the heathen have learned to love that Saviour, who has been so often made known to you, but whom they never heard of till lately. And even where the parents have continued to worship idols, some of their children have refused to do so any more: and they have persevered in refusing, though their parents have been so angry with them on this account, as to threaten that they would turn them out of doors. Now, if you do not make so good an improvement of your many advantages as the little Indians or Africans make of the little instruction they have received, when they must expect to suffer a great deal for doing what is right; I say, if this should be the case, you could not be surprised though God were provoked to deprive you of Bibles, and ministers, and teachers altogether, and leave you to remain in the broad road which leadeth to destruction.

The Saviour once told some of the Jews, that they should see many coming "from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south," and sitting down in the kingdom of God, while they themselves should be "thrust out," Luke xiii. 28, 29: and the same may be said to you, if you still refuse to render unto God the fruits that he demands of you.* The Saviour once wept over Jerusalem, and said, "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are

* See the Parable of the Barren Fig-tree, on page 81.

hid from thine eyes." And be assured, that, however little you think of him, he looks with grief and pity on you, while you disregard your own present and everlasting happiness. You think that those were hard-hearted men, who "caught him, and cast him out, and slew him;" but you are not less hard-hearted than they, while you keep him out of your hearts; and neglect that Saviour who endured so much suffering at their hands.





THE PARABLE OF THE KING WHO MADE
A MARRIAGE FOR HIS SON.

MATTHEW XXII. 1—14.

PERHAPS some of my young readers have been present at a marriage; and even those who have not, may know that it is always an occasion of feasting. At such a time, people expect their friends to visit them, and to share in the good things which they have provided. But the marriage of a king's son is more important than that of any one else; and a king can also afford to make a richer feast, and to invite a greater number of guests, than any other person could do. The king and his son, mentioned in this parable, are intended to teach us something about God, the King of all the earth, and his Son Jesus Christ.

The time of the marriage means the time when Jesus Christ came into the world, and became a man, as well as God. He did this in order that he might purchase a people for himself. When sinners believe in him, they

preach in all parts of the country, about the happiness which all might enjoy by coming to him. And after he had gone back to heaven, the twelve apostles, and others, preached frequently in Jerusalem, earnestly inviting all who heard them to accept of that salvation which the Saviour had provided. There were many persons who did accept it; but the far greater number of the Jews were like those whom the king sent to call; they not only still refused to come, but some treated the messengers of Christ very ill. They had put him to death, and they showed how much they continued to hate him, by their conduct towards his servants. They put Peter and John in prison, Acts iv. 1—22; at another time, they did the same to the whole of the apostles, and even threatened to kill them, v. 17—40. Soon after, they stoned Stephen to death, vii. 54—60; and, if you read other parts of the Acts of the Apostles, you will find several accounts of ill-treatment given by the Jews to the servants of Christ, who invited sinners to the gospel-feast.

These good men bore all their sufferings without being angry, or returning evil for evil; indeed, Stephen prayed for his murderers. But God was displeased with those, who not only refused the mercy that he promised them, but showed cruelty to the men who were sent to tell them of it. He had patience with them for a time; but as they did not repent, he, at length, brought judgment upon them in a very dreadful manner. It is said, in the parable, that the king "was wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city." This represents the way in which God punished the Jews, for putting the Saviour and many of his messengers to death. There was a people called the Romans, who lived in a country far distant from Canaan, and they sent an army to fight against Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the greatest city in the land of Canaan, and being the place where the Saviour had been crucified, and where many of his servants had been injured, it suffered the most from the

Roman army. For though they knew nothing of God, and though they fought against the Jews only to please themselves, yet it was God who was making use of them, though they did not know it. They came and surrounded the city on every side, so that no one could go out or come in; and, for a length of time, the inhabitants suffered dreadfully for want of food, and many died. At length, the Romans got into Jerusalem; they put great numbers of the Jews to death, and pulled down all the buildings of the city so completely, that the ground where they had stood was ploughed over.

When the king found that those who had been invited to the feast would not come, he desired his servants to "go out into the highways, and as many as ye shall find," said he, "bid to the marriage." This means, that when the Jews refused to listen to the invitation of the gospel, God sent it to other nations who had not heard it before. Till that time, the Jews were the only people who had the word of God, or knew any thing of him. All the other nations of the world were called Gentiles, and worshipped idols, as the heathens do still. After the death of Stephen, the servants of Christ were so cruelly treated at Jerusalem that they were almost all obliged to leave it, and flee for their lives. They preached the gospel wherever they went, Acts viii. 1, 4; and in a few years, it had been carried to every part of the world that was known at that time. In every place, great numbers of persons believed what was preached, and obtained those blessings which were offered to them.

These blessings are so numerous and so great, that it is impossible to name them all; but I will mention some of them. When any one accepts the invitation that is given to all, and comes to the gospel-feast, all his sins are forgiven; God is no longer angry with him, but treats him the same as if he had never offended him. He is no longer a child or servant of Satan, but he becomes the child and servant of God; he has God's

promise, that he shall never want any thing that is good for him, while he lives ; and that, when he dies, he shall go to his Father's house in heaven, to stay there for ever. And lest any of my readers should be at a loss to know what is meant by coming to the gospel-feast, I would just add, that it means the same thing as believing the gospel. If you believe that the gospel is true, you will earnestly desire to have the blessings which it makes known ; you will immediately ask them from God, and thus you will obtain them, you will enjoy the feast.

Now, my dear children, you should be very thankful that ever God sent the gospel to the Gentiles. This country, where we live, is many hundreds of miles from that in which the gospel was first preached to the Jews. At the time Jerusalem was destroyed, our forefathers in this land were as ignorant of the true God, and were as foolish in worshipping false gods, as any of the heathen whom you sometimes hear of. And you ought to bless God, not only for sending his servants to Britain, at first, but for allowing them still to continue, to invite sinners to the feast.

You, perhaps, wonder how any one would refuse an invitation from a king ; but if you are still careless about the salvation of your souls, you are refusing the invitation of God. And the reason is, that you feel no desire for those blessings which he offers to you. When you are not hungry, you do not wish for bread ; and if you were sick, and had quite lost your appetite, you would have no pleasure in eating even the dainties of a feast. God offers you the pardon of all your sins ; but you think that you have never done much harm ; you are not afraid of being punished, and so you do not care about being pardoned. God offers to take you into his favour, and to treat you as if you had never offended him ; but you do not love him, and it does not make you unhappy to know that he is angry with you. He offers to make you his own children, to make you fit for heaven, and to take you there when you die ; but you think that you

have many years to stay in this world, and you have no desire for heaven at present. Oh, if these are your feelings, what must God think of you? You know that people are offended if those whom they invite to visit them refuse to come: and when a king invites any, it is the same as if he commanded them to come, and it is the greatest contempt of his authority to refuse. But God, who invites you to the gospel-feast, is the King of kings, and it is awful indeed if you dare to refuse his invitation. A king who was very rich, and had many servants, might make a great feast without much trouble or difficulty. But this is not the case with the feast to which God invites you. His own dear Son suffered pain and agony, such as no tongue can describe, in order that this feast might be prepared. The price that it cost was *his blood*! Can you think of this, and still refuse it?

The parable mentions, that those who would not come to the feast went away, every one to attend to his particular business. And there are many people now, who say they have so much to do, that they have not time for being religious. But this is a foolish excuse; because, though they may be obliged to work six days, there is always the seventh day for a day of rest. God knows that poor people have to work hard, and yet he says, that "to the poor the gospel is preached." And he also says, "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Besides, it is a great mistake to suppose, that if people become religious they must neglect their work. If they would only obtain the blessings of the gospel, they would not only become more diligent in business than they ever were before, but they would attend to it with much greater pleasure and cheerfulness.

Perhaps you intend to accept the invitation of God at some future time, but he invites you to come now; and if you delay, you may be too late; "for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, when once the master is risen up, and hath shut to the door," etc.



THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING-GARMENT.

MATTHEW XXII. 10—14.

THE king's servants did as he commanded them. "They went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good." And after all the guests had been brought to the wedding, the king came in to see them.

In the country where the Jews lived, it was the custom at a wedding, not only to make a feast for those who were invited, but also to provide a dress for every one to wear. And if any person refused to put on the dress provided, it was reckoned an affront to the master of the house. The king saw one man among the guests who had not put it on, and he asked him why he had not done so. The man was speechless, that is, he had no good reason to give for acting as he had done. The king said to his servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness."

If we consider who they were that were gathered together to this feast, we shall see that they all needed wedding-garments. They were people brought in from

the highways. Perhaps many of them were travellers, whose clothes were covered with dust, or even worn with the length of their journey. Others might be beggars, covered with rags; and some were, most likely, persons engaged in their ordinary business, clothed in their working dress. None of these could be fit to sit down and feast with a king, dressed as they were; and there was no time for any one to go home and change his dress.

All this is to teach us, that we are not naturally in a fit state to appear before God. He is not only infinitely great and glorious, while we are poor and feeble creatures, but he is perfectly holy. "He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and cannot look upon sin;" that is, the sight of sin is disgusting and abominable to him; just as the sight of a dirty, filthy beggar would be to a king. Our souls are sinful, they love sin, and are full of it; and in order to show us how hateful to God sinners all are, they are often compared in the Bible to a person covered with sores; to one who is naked, or who is clothed with filthy garments, Isa. i. 5, 6; lxiv. 6; Zech. iii. 3, 4; Rev. iii. 17. As wedding-garments were provided for those who came to the king's feast, so God has provided something to cover our naked, diseased souls, that he may be able to look on them without dislike: see Isa. lxi. 10; Zech. iii. 3—5; Rev. iii. 18; xix. 8.

Now, my youthful readers, what do you think this garment is which God has provided to cover our souls? It is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, by which they become holy. He shed his blood, in order that our souls might be washed from the filth of sin; that is, he suffered the punishment of sin instead of us; so that if we believe in him, God will not punish us. But something more was necessary before God could look at us with approbation. You know what it means for a man to be condemned to be executed; and you have heard that sometimes, after a person is thus condemned, the king pardons his crime, and says that he is not to suffer execution. But though the man is not punished for his crime, yet neither the king nor any one else can think

that he is a good man. His character is lost; every person will remember that he once broke the law of the land; and no one will trust him, or like to have any thing to do with him. Still less would it be likely that the king should make him a great man, and take him to live in his palace. Now, this will help you to understand why it is, that we need the righteousness of Christ, as well as his sacrifice on the cross. It never would have made us happy to be only forgiven, and saved from going to hell, if God had still continued to be dissatisfied with us. The Bible says, that "in his favour is life;" and though many people are careless about his favour, yet it is impossible for any one to be truly happy without it. And how could we expect the honour of being called his children, and taken to his house above, when we have never done any thing that is good? The man of whom we have spoken, who escaped being executed, might hope, by his future good conduct, to gain a character, and to deserve respect. And so some people fancy, that if they do some good works, and become very attentive to religious duties, they will deserve to go to heaven. But such persons forget what the Bible says, that if one should "keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all," James ii. 10. Nothing but perfect and constant obedience to God's law can merit heaven. They forget that to obey God's law, they must love him with all their hearts; and that he can see when they sin against him even in their thoughts. It is both foolish and wicked for any to try to recommend themselves to God by their own good works, for he has said, that it is impossible for them to do so, Rom. iii. 20; Gal. ii. 16.

You see then, my dear children, that we have no righteousness of our own, and that unless we are made righteous, we cannot be pleasing to God, or go to heaven. But you have been told, that the righteousness of Christ is that wedding-garment which God has provided to cover our naked souls. The meaning of this is, that if we believe what God says about Jesus Christ, and trust

in him as our only Saviour, then all his obedience to his Father's law will be reckoned to us, the same as if it were our own. Because God is satisfied with the sinless and perfect righteousness of his Son, he will look upon us with favour, the same as if we had done it all ourselves. But, let me tell you one thing, which you must never forget, that it is still your duty to try to please God in every thing, and to obey all his commandments as much as you can. If you hope to be made righteous before him, only by the righteousness of Christ, you will never think of deserving any good thing by what you can do yourselves; but, at the same time, you will love God so much, that it will be your delight to do his will.

The great lesson which this parable is designed to teach, is—That there are some people who call themselves Christians, and who are thought to be Christians by others in this world, who will be found, in the day of judgment, to have been only hypocrites. It is not said, that any of the other guests noticed the man who was without the wedding-garment; and so it is possible for you to make your fellow-creatures think that you are very good, when you are not really so: they cannot see your hearts, and you may behave so well when you are in their presence, that you may quite deceive them. But as soon as the king came in, he saw the man immediately. And so at the day of judgment, Jesus Christ the Judge will know at once who have been made righteous, and who have only pretended to be so. You remember, that the man mentioned in the parable had never sat down to the feast: and so, if you should only appear good outwardly, while you do not seek to have your souls made clean, and covered with the robe of the Saviour's righteousness, you will never taste the happiness of true religion. You will never enjoy the pleasure of calling God your Father, and knowing that he has forgiven you all your sins. Though others may praise you, you will know in your own mind, that you are not pleasing to God; and when death comes near, how will you tremble to think of standing in his presence!

Do you not think, that the man would be very much ashamed, when the king spoke to him, before all the rest of the people, and asked him why he had not on the wedding-garment? And, oh, how ashamed will you be, if you are found without it at last, when the Judge shall speak to you before the whole world; when he shall tell all the secret sins that you have committed, in the presence of God, and angels, and men! The man could give no good reason for acting as he had done, and neither will you have any excuse to make at last. You cannot say that you did not know you needed to be made righteous; for you have been told that again and again. You cannot say that you never heard of the righteousness of Christ; for you have been often told of that too. As "the king commanded his servants to bind the man hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness," so the Judge will command his angels to bind you hand and foot, and cast you into the place, "where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." It will be impossible for you to escape; there will be no place where you can hide. You must take up your abode for ever with the devil and his angels.

But, my dear children, I cannot bear to think that any of you should be so miserable. The king has not yet come in to see the guests; there is still time for you to put on the wedding-garment. And, oh, when you think that Jesus Christ spent his whole life in sorrow and suffering, in order to provide that garment for you, how can you continue to be careless about it? I have tried to explain it to you as plainly as I can; but I know you may still find it difficult quite to understand it. But though *I* cannot teach you to know the meaning of all these things, God can do it. He has promised to give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. The Divine Teacher never refuses to instruct the youngest or the slowest scholar that really desires to learn of him. He "is able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

MATTHEW XXV. 1—13.

IN that country where the Saviour preached, there are many customs different from any with which my young readers are acquainted. They have already* read something of what was customary in that part of the world at a wedding: there are several other things which I must tell them before they can understand this parable. It was always at night that the bridegroom went to fetch home the bride: when he was accompanied by bridesmaids, generally ten in number at least; who carried torches or lamps. The feast was prepared at the bridegroom's house.

The ten virgins, or young women, mentioned in this parable, were bridesmaids; and they were sitting up, waiting till the bridegroom should call for them. It is said, that five of them were wise, and five of them were foolish. It was certainly very foolish behaviour to take lamps without oil. The five who were wise were more prudent; they had oil in vessels, besides their lamps. They were expected to be ready to go out and meet the bridegroom the moment he came near; but it was late at night, and, being drowsy, they all fell asleep. At midnight, they heard a cry that the bridegroom was coming. They all arose in haste, to get their lamps ready. The foolish virgins found that their lamps would not burn for want of oil, and they asked the rest to give them some of theirs. But though the wise virgins had enough for themselves, they had none to spare, so they advised the others to go and buy oil. In the meantime, the bridegroom came; the wise virgins being all ready, joined him at once, and took the places appointed for them in the procession. The foolish virgins being too late to do this, came afterwards to the door of his house.

* Alluding to the explanation of the Wedding garment, on p. 144.

but it was already shut. They called to the bridegroom himself to admit them, as if confident that he would own their claim to be his guests. His only reply, however, was, that he knew them not.

These ten virgins mean persons who call themselves religious, and say that they are waiting till Christ shall come, to take them to heaven. I have told you already* that he is also called the Husband, or the Bridegroom of his people. You know that he is to come again at the last day to judge the world; and all those who have loved and served him on earth shall then go with him to his house, which is in heaven. But the bridegroom's coming may also mean the time of our death; because, if we are ready for death, we need not be afraid of judgment; and if we are not ready at death, it will be impossible after it to do any thing to prepare ourselves. The virgins did not know exactly at what hour the bridegroom would come and want them; and we know not when the hour of our death may be. But they knew for certain that he would come, and they ought not to have fallen asleep; they should have been watching for the first sound of his coming, that they might go to meet him instantly. And since we know that we must die *some* time, we ought to be *always* ready for death. We should never do, or think, or say any thing that we should not like to be doing, or thinking, or saying, when death comes to take us out of the world.

But all are too apt to forget that they may very soon be called into eternity: you see that the wise virgins slept, as well as the foolish ones. Even real Christians are sometimes so taken up with the things of this world, that they are not inclined to think about death. If they have to work for their living, they may spend too much time and thought in providing for the body; and they perhaps begin to think, that they have not so much leisure for prayer and reading the Bible, as they used to have. Or if they are rich, and have many kind

* In explaining the Marriage Feast, see p. 138.

friends, they are apt to be content with their present enjoyments, and to feel little desire of going immediately to heaven. It is very wrong of them to act in this manner; indeed they are more to blame in doing so, than if they had never known true religion at all.

It was not at all wonderful that the foolish virgins should have slept. And so we cannot wonder if those who only call themselves Christians should live as if they were never to die. It cannot be pleasant to them to think of death; but they should consider that it will come, whether they think of it or not. As they have no reason to expect happiness in the next world, it is natural for them to seek after every thing that they think can make them happy in this. They wish others to think well of them; and for that reason they may go regularly to a place of worship, and appear to be very strict in the duties of religion. But they have no pleasure in such things; they are much more concerned about present ease and carnal enjoyments, than about having their souls ready to meet the heavenly Bridegroom. Surely they may well be called foolish, when they are content to be considered as Christians by fellow-creatures, while unprepared to meet with Christ himself, who may come and detect them at any moment.

A cry was made at midnight that the bridegroom was coming; and when people are taken very ill, and they find that nothing can do them any good, it is a warning to them that death is very near. There was no difference to be seen between the wise and the foolish virgins while they all slumbered and slept, but there was a great difference when they awoke. The wise soon lighted their lamps, and went to meet the bridegroom, but the foolish could not get their lamps to burn for want of oil. So, in the same way, there may be too little difference seen, between true Christians and some others, in the time of health; but they will appear very different indeed when they are laid upon a death-bed.

Those who have really believed in Christ, will be sorry

that they had been so much taken up with this world, and so forgetful of the next; but they will confess their sin to God, and pray that it may be forgiven for their Saviour's sake. They know that he is an Almighty Saviour, and that his blood cleanseth from all sin; and they will not be afraid to commit their souls into his hands. They will wonder and be ashamed that they should ever have preferred any pleasures or employments to those of true religion; and while they blame themselves for such conduct, and deeply repent of it, they will rejoice to think that in heaven they shall sin no more. They will long for the coming of the great Bridegroom, that they may go to dwell with him, where they shall see him as he is, and love him as they ought.

But oh, how terrified must those be, at the thought that death is near, who have never in their hearts loved Christ! The foolish virgins begged the rest to give them some of their oil; and thus many foolish, ignorant people, when they are dying, beg that a minister or some other good person may come and pray with them. They fancy that, somehow or other, these prayers will do them good. But as the wise virgins had no oil to spare, so it can be of no use to any to have the prayers of good people, if they do not pray for themselves. The wise advised the foolish virgins to go and buy oil, but this must have been difficult at such an hour; and before they could get any, it was too late: the bridegroom had shut the door. And though a minister or any other Christian friend may tell a dying person about the Saviour, and that, for Christ's sake, God is willing to forgive his sins, even at the last hour; yet he may be so ill that he can hardly listen to what is said; or he may have read the Bible with so little attention while he was well, that he scarcely knows what is meant. He has been accustomed to slumber and sleep, to banish serious thoughts, and avoid every thing that might have had a tendency to disturb or alarm him; and now when convinced that death is really at hand, though terror may induce him to attempt some kind of prepara-

tion for the solemn event, yet with his heart unrenewed, and ignorant of the Saviour, he dies in his sins, and finds heaven shut against him for ever. Oh, what an awful end!

Now do not think that this parable is only for old people, and that you have nothing to learn from it. You cannot tell but you may die young, and therefore *you* ought to be always ready for death. This very night you may hear the cry made, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh;" or you may die in a moment, without even hearing that cry: but if you should be ill for some time, you will find it a very difficult thing to begin to prepare for death then. I do not mean to say that it is impossible; for with God all things are possible. But if you do not like to attend to your souls now, while you are well, how do you think you could do it if you were racked with pain?





THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW XXV. 14—30.

THIS parable tells of a rich man who was going to travel into a distant country, to be absent for a long time. He did not wish his servants to be idle while he was away, so he gave some money to each of them, which they were to use for him. We are also told how each of the servants used the different sums that he gave them; how he called them to account after he came back; and how he rewarded each of them.

The man travelling into a far country is intended to represent the Lord Jesus Christ, who has left this world, and gone into heaven. The talents given to the servants are all the things which Jesus Christ has given to those who are his servants, which they can employ in his service.

Money is one talent which he has given to them; and though they are to provide what is necessary for themselves and their families, whatever money they can spare after doing that, ought to be spent in serving

Christ. He does not, as you know, need it himself, but he has commanded them to help the poor, especially such as love him. He considers every kindness shown to them the same as if done to himself. It is also the duty of his servants to give money to buy Bibles for those who have none, and who cannot pay for them; to help to support those ministers who employ themselves in preaching the gospel; and to assist in the expense of missionaries going to the heathen. In these ways, and in many others, money may be used in the service of Christ.

Leisure time is another talent, which he has given to his servants. Many of them have to spend a great part of their time in working for their bread; and even while they are doing that they are serving him, if they are diligent and industrious, because he has commanded them to be so. But whatever leisure they have, they should especially try to use it in his service. They should take every proper opportunity of reading the Bible, praying to God, hearing his word, and thinking about what they have read and heard. By his blessing, they will thus learn to love him more and more, they will become more anxious to do his will, and be made fit to enter heaven. They should also try to instruct those who are ignorant of the way of salvation, and to talk to them of the love of Christ, that they may be led to love him too.

It is impossible for me to tell you all the different talents, which Jesus Christ has given to his servants; but whatever they have, that they can in any way use to serve him, is a talent committed to them by him. And remember, that whatever *any man* possesses, he has received from God, whether he is a servant of Christ or not. None should think, that because they do not pretend to be his servants, therefore they may make what use they please of the things they have. It is still their duty to use the gifts of God for his glory. Those who do not love the Saviour will never think of employing their all in his service; but their not loving

him, instead of being an excuse, only makes their sin greater.

The servants in the parable did not all get the same sum of money, but "every man according to his several ability:" and neither have all the servants of Christ received the same number of talents, but each one has got what is most suitable for him. Thus, some have more money, or more leisure than others; some have a good memory, and a great deal of learning,* while others know very little, and can hardly remember any thing that they hear. But as the servant that received two talents traded with them, as well as the one who had five, so none should think that his having less than some others is any excuse for neglecting to serve Christ. Perhaps children may think, that surely Christ has not given them any talents. But have not you sometimes half-pence to spend, which you might give to the Missionary, Bible, or Tract Society, or to the poor? If you really love the Saviour, you would find far more pleasure in giving a penny for such purposes, than in buying toys or sweet things. And do you not spend a great deal of time in play, when you might be reading the Bible, or going to hear a week-day sermon? I do not say that you should *never* play; God does not desire that young people should give up innocent amusements, or that they should be always reading and praying. But I *do* say, that *all* your leisure hours should not be spent in play; and that you would be much more cheerful and happy than you are, if you spent some of them in serving Christ. You can read; now, is there no blind, nor aged, nor sick man or woman you know, that would let you read a chapter of the Bible, or a tract, to them sometimes? Perhaps these persons had not so much instruction when they were young as you have: they may not know the way of salvation; but they might learn it, if you were to read to them; or, if they do know it already, it would be a great pleasure to them to hear the Bible read when they are not able to read it themselves. You see that even children have talents

committed to them; and you may easily find out others besides those that I have mentioned.

"After a long time, the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them." This is to teach us, that Christ will come again to call men to give an account of the manner in which they have used their talents. We read in the Bible of some people who were so foolish and wicked as to say, because he is so long in coming, that he will never come at all. But, however long it may be till then, he will certainly come, and those who have spoken in such a way will find themselves awfully mistaken.

Each of the servants told their master what use they had made of the money he had given them; and so, "every one of us must give account of himself to God." Those of them who had made a good use of it did not boast of what they had done. Thus the true servants of Christ, who have faithfully employed all their talents in his service, will not be proud of their good works, or suppose that they have deserved any reward for them. While they are in this world, they do not do what is right in order that men may praise them; they rather try to hide many of their good actions from others. But at the day of judgment, the Saviour will call upon them to tell all these things before the whole multitude of all the men that have ever lived; and then those who formerly ridiculed them will be ashamed; while they themselves will be unspeakably happy in being kindly approved by the Judge. There was sin mixed with all they did on earth, even with their best services; but their sins will not be mentioned then, because they have been all forgiven for the Saviour's sake. The master said, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." If you read from the 34th verse to the 40th of the chapter which contains this parable, you will see what the Judge will say at last to his faithful servants.

The servant who had but one talent came and said,

"Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed ; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth." There are few persons so bold as to say that God is a hard master, who requires more than they can perform ; but many think so in their hearts. All men naturally hate him, and dislike to submit to him, Rom. viii. 7. And at the day of judgment, all their wicked and foolish thoughts of God will be exposed before angels and men. They may satisfy themselves now with thinking that their faults are hid from others, but how ashamed will they be then ! Dan. xii. 2.

The lord of that idle servant did not excuse him because he had such thoughts ; he showed, that even if he had been as hard a master as the servant imagined, that should only have made him the more anxious to do at least what he could to please him. And those will be found without excuse at last, who have refused to use their talents in the service of Christ. They will be obliged to own that they deserve that awful punishment which shall come upon them. They will be deprived of all that they once possessed ; while more and more honour and happiness will be given to the faithful servants. Those who diligently serve Christ with the little that they have, may expect that he will, in due time, give them more ; indeed, the longer they serve him, the more they will love him, and the more they will be able to do for him. But such as seek only to please themselves, and are too slothful to serve him, will sooner or later lose all the talents they now enjoy : this sometimes happens even in this world ; but if not, it certainly will be the case at the day of judgment. The "unprofitable servant" was to be cast into "outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." See Matt. xxv. 41—46.

There are two things which children should particularly remember in this parable. The first is, that the servant who had only one talent had to give an account

of it, as well as those men who had more. And if children have fewer, or smaller talents than others, still they will have to give an account of themselves to God, as well as older people. They will have to tell what improvement they made of every sermon they heard, every lesson they learned, and every hour that they were allowed to spend as they pleased. The "dead, *small* and great," shall stand to be judged, Rev. xx. 12.

The second thing which I wish children to remember is, that the servant who was cast into outer darkness, had not wasted or stolen his master's money; he had only allowed it to lie unemployed. And so, it will not be enough for children to say, that they did not tear or destroy their books, that they never spent their leisure hours in working mischief, or laughed and talked while they were hearing the addresses of their teacher. If they have not done so, they will not be punished for it; but they will still deserve punishment, if they have not *improved* the things I have named, as they might have done. Let them at once confess their past neglects; and while they earnestly seek forgiveness through the blood of Christ, let them implore also his grace to use aright all those talents which they may receive.



PARABLE OF THE
THE PARABLE OF THE VINE AND
THE BRANCHES.

JOHN XV. 1—11.

PART I.

WHEN the Lord Jesus Christ was upon earth, there were a few persons who so much delighted in hearing his instructions, that they were called his disciples, or scholars; and they followed him wherever he went. Though they were often slow to learn his lessons, yet they dearly loved their Master, and he at all times showed a tender affection for them. He well knew what sufferings he had to endure, and more than once he told his disciples of this; but he does not appear to have mentioned to them the time when he should suffer till it drew very near, Matt. xvii. 22, 23; xx. 17—19; xxvi. 2, 45. On the night before he was crucified, knowing that he had but a very short time to remain with them, he spoke to them of his death more freely and plainly than before. Sorrow filled their hearts, to think that they should so soon lose him; and he showed all the tenderness of his love to them in what he said to comfort them. The verses which we now wish to explain are a part of his last discourse to his disciples; and nothing could have been more cheering to their minds than what these verses contain. When people are heavily afflicted, they are often so oppressed with their own trouble, that they feel no inclination to speak even to those who love them most. But here we see Jesus in the immediate prospect of distress more dreadful than we can imagine, yet seeming to forget all his own sorrows in his anxiety to relieve the sorrows of his friends.

Some of my readers may never have seen a vine. They have heard of it, however, as the tree on which grapes grow; in the land of Judea, vines were very common. When Moses sent twelve men out of the wilderness, to search the land of Canaan, and to bring some of the fruit that grew in it, they brought back with them a large bunch of grapes, Numb. xiii. 1—25.

Some people suppose that Jesus took occasion to speak of the vine, from the juice of the vine, which he and his disciples had been drinking, and which might still be on the table, Matt. xxvi. 27—29. Others think that he spoke these words on his way to the Mount of Olives, because he had just before said, "Arise, let us go hence," John xiv. 31. If this were the case, he might point to vines growing near his path.

In this parable the Saviour seems chiefly to intend to teach us, that all his people are closely joined or united to himself; and also to explain what is meant by their being thus joined. The same thing is mentioned in other parts of the New Testament; and various figures are used in order to explain it. Thus Christ is spoken of as the Head of the body, and his people are described as the members or limbs of that body, 1 Cor. xii. 27; Col. i. 18. He is represented as the Bridegroom or Husband of his church; and the church is called his bride, or his wife, Matt. ix. 15; 2 Cor. xi. 2; Rev. xix. 7. In this place he begins by saying, "I am the True Vine." Good works are often called, in the Bible, by the name of good fruit; and grapes are particularly mentioned when God speaks of his church, and of that obedience to his will which he expected from it, Matt. iii. 8, 10; Isa. v. 1—7. But grapes could not possibly grow without a vine being planted, and growing up to have a trunk, or stem. So, when Christ says, "I am the True Vine," he means, that as men are naturally sinful, and love to do evil, they can never do any really good works, unless he enables them. He is the only "Mediator between God and men," 1 Tim. ii. 5. He alone can remove God's anger from sinners, so that God can be pleased with any thing they do; and he alone can remove the dislike which sinners have to God, and incline them to do his will from the heart. To accomplish all this he came into the world, obeyed the law of God, and suffered death upon the cross. And it is only when sinners believe the account of this given in the Bible, that they begin in earnest to serve God.

Jesus adds, "and my Father is the Husbandman." "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved," John iii. 17. He delights to receive repenting sinners into his favour, and rejoices when they are brought to seek it. And those whom Christ has reconciled to him he calls his own, John xiii. 1. He values them highly, even as a precious treasure, Mal. iii. 17, and continually provides whatever is needful for their improvement; just as a husbandman or gardener is concerned that his trees should be fruitful, and takes care to do all that can make them more so.

Though none but believers in Jesus can have any pleasure in the service of God, yet some people wish to be thought his servants, while they are not. They either fancy that they may thus deceive the Judge of all; or else that their fellow creatures will think better of them, because they profess to be Christians. But whatever people may say, we have no reason to believe that they are Christians unless they do what is right. The Saviour says in another place, "By their fruits ye shall know them," Matt. vii. 16—20. Now, such persons as we have been describing shall not long continue among the people of Christ; for he says, verse 2, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away." They ought to be separated from the church of Christ on earth; for their example must be hurtful, and their presence disagreeable to those who truly love Christ. But, certainly, on the last day, their real characters will be made known, and they will be for ever "taken away" from among the fruitful branches. Read Matt. vii. 21.

Those who are really joined to the True Vine, show that this is the case by the good fruits which are seen in their conduct. Their great desire is to please God in all things, and to make known how much they love him, by doing whatever he commands. Thus children, who have been joined to Christ, are dutiful to their parents, kind to their brothers and sisters, and attentive to their teachers. Love to God makes them delight in

worshipping him ; and they are ready to say, when the sabbath comes round, "This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it," Psa. cxviii. 24. I have said before, that it is only when the gospel is believed that sinners begin to serve God ; in other words, it is faith which joins a sinner to Christ, the True Vine. And faith is not a hard word, which little children cannot understand. You believe your mother, if she promises to have your dinner ready when you come home from school ; you believe your father, when he promises to take you out to walk with him the first time you have a holiday : this is having faith in your earthly parents. Well, if you believe the word of God when it says, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly," Rom. v. 6 ; "Even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come," 1 Thess. i. 10 ; "And this is the record that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son," 1 John v. 11 ;* then this is having faith in your heavenly Father, and in his Son Jesus Christ. This faith will join you to Christ ; it will make you feel that you are concerned in all that he did, and said, and suffered on earth, and in all that he is now doing in heaven. Faith will lead you to depend, fearlessly and entirely, on him, to save you from sin, and from all its consequences. And thus believing that he will make you safe and happy for ever, you will love him with all your heart ; especially when you reflect how much he suffered to obtain eternal happiness for you. He delights to see a little child committing its soul into his hands, and loving him as its best friend, Prov. viii. 17. The love and regard which he feels for such a child is like that which we feel for all the parts of our own body, Eph. v. 29, 30. He never forgets the youngest or weakest believers for a moment : he is ever careful to keep them safe from danger ; whatever pain

* None of my readers will suppose, that I mean they should believe these particular passages of Scripture, in distinction from the rest. Every part of the Bible declares the very same truths concerning Christ, and it is impossible to believe any one portion of it, without believing the whole.

they may feel, he feels it as if he suffered it himself, Matt. xxv. 42—45; Acts ix. 1—5; and he will be strengthening them to bear the fruits of righteousness, just as the branches of a tree are kept green and fruitful, by the juice or sap that comes from the root. Thus, my dear children, I have endeavoured to show you what faith is, and how it joins the soul to Christ; but ever remember, that your sinful hearts are unwilling to believe what God says. His Holy Spirit alone can remove this unwillingness, and show you the glory and beauty of Christ. "Faith is the gift of God," Eph. ii. 8. May he, of his abundant mercy, bestow this precious gift on every child who reads this!

Even those who are joined to Christ, and who show this by their good fruits, are yet not so fruitful as they wish to be. They are never satisfied with themselves, as if they had done enough. And God, the heavenly Husbandman, is still desiring them to increase and abound yet more in every good word and work, 1 Cor. xv. 58; 2 Cor. ix. 10. Not that he needs their service; but it is for their own advantage, that they should be "filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God," Phil. i. 11. It is said, in verse 2, "Every branch in me that beareth fruit, he purgeth" (that is, cleanseth) "it, that it may bring forth more fruit." A gardener removes every hurtful worm or fly, and all the useless leaves and shoots from his trees. And God is continually using means to remove the sin that remains in his people. Affliction is one means which he often employs for this purpose, Isa. xxvii. 8, 9. A child might suppose that a gardener was hurting a tree by cutting it. And it may surprise you, that God should afflict his people because he loves them. Pain and sorrow are certainly very distressing. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby," Heb. xii. 11. Affliction, by itself, cannot yield this peaceable fruit: no one is ever any better for

merely suffering distress. But "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God," Rom. viii. 28. The Holy Spirit is particularly promised to be with them in the time of trial. And the people of God have always found affliction blessed to do them good, Psa. cxix. 67, 71. It leads them to see more of the evil of sin, which is the cause of all trouble; and more of the vanity of every thing on earth. And it also convinces them more than ever that Christ is precious; that their only rest and their best enjoyment are in heaven; and that their heavenly Father is the God of all comfort, 2 Cor. i. 3—5. Thus they become more careful not to do wrong, and less anxious about the things of this world: they are made more eager to get home to their Father's house; and yet, loving him better than ever, they become more active in serving him below. Affliction, too, is particularly suited, when thus sanctified, for bringing to perfection many lovely dispositions, which are called in Scripture the "fruits of the Spirit." The apostle Paul, who had many afflictions, spoke of them thus: "We glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope," Rom. v. 3, 4: see also Gal. v. 22, 23; James i. 2—4. My dear young friend, has God afflicted you in early life? Oh, turn to him that smiteth you; out of the deepest distress cry unto him, and "he will be very gracious unto you at the voice of your cry." He will make the chastening to be for your profit, that you may be a partaker of his holiness, Heb. xii. 10; and then you will know that "it is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," Lam. iii. 27.

After mentioning that the great Husbandman cleans the fruitful branches, the Saviour says, verse 3, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." And on the same sorrowful evening, in praying for his disciples, he said, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth." *Cleaning*, in chap. xv. 3, and *sanctifying*, in chap. xvii. 17, mean

the same thing; to sanctify is to make holy. It is believing the words of Christ that first makes any one dislike sin and love holiness. And the reason why believers continue to read and hear his word is, that they still need to be sanctified more and more. Now, there is a part of one of the Psalms that makes this very interesting to young persons: "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word," *Psa. cxix. 9.* To cleanse your way, must mean to keep from sinning against God; for sin is so offensive to him, that it is compared to filth of the most abominable kind, *Psa. xiv. 3*; *Prov. xxx. 12*, etc. And there are many other passages of Scripture which speak of the word of God as able to preserve from sin, *Psa. xvii. 4*; *Acts xx. 32*, etc. Oh then, my dear children, value your Bibles; do not think it a task to read them, or to learn portions of them by heart. And while you are diligent in reading and learning, ever remember that the word of God will not sanctify you unless you believe it. Seek, then, to obtain "precious faith," like that which Christ's disciples had: see *2 Pet. i. 1.*

In verse 4, the Saviour says, "Abide in me, and I in you." He was about to return to heaven, where his disciples could not see him; and the thoughts of this were very painful to them. But he assured them that he should still be united to them. His love to them would remain as great, and he would feel as much interested in every thing that concerned them, as he had been accustomed to do on earth. Many have since that time been disciples of his, though they could not see him. It is only by believing what the Bible says of him, that we can know anything of him here; but how delightful it is to think that, in his glory and happiness above, he does not forget the poorest of his followers below! Nay, so near is he to them at all times, that he is said to dwell in them, *Eph. iii. 17*; *1 John iv. 13.* So that he always knows what is needful for them, and is ever ready to supply it. And it is their greatest happiness and only safety to abide in

him; that is, to be continually trusting in him and thinking of him. They are called to *walk* by faith; that is, to go on every day as long as they live, looking to him. Now, perhaps you remember a time when your teacher, or your parents, spoke very affectionately to you on the danger you were in as a sinner, and on the love of Christ, and his willingness to save you. You thought very seriously of these things afterwards; you were afraid of going to hell, and you could not help feeling that it was kind of Jesus to die for your salvation. You prayed that, for his sake, God would forgive your sins; and then you felt happy, and thought you would try to sin no more. For a few days, perhaps, you did every thing right, and really found pleasure in religious exercises. But, by degrees, you gave over attending so diligently to duty; you left off one good thing after another, and now you have no desire whatever to please God. Ah! this is because you did not abide in Christ; for he says here, verse 4, "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me." If this be your case, then attend seriously to what will afterwards be said on verse 6.

PART II.

IN verse 5, the Saviour again comforts his disciples, by saying, "I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing." Like the root of a tree hid in the ground, he would soon be removed from the sight of men, and his people might seem to be left like branches scattered on the ground. But this should not be the case. They should still be joined to him; and he could and would enable them to bring forth much fruit, while they continued to believe his words. But it is not they only who have found this to be true. All his people, to the end of the world, shall be made faithful in the same way. Every hour they need grace, that is, help from him; and every hour they

must be expecting and desiring it. They come boldly to the throne of grace, that they may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need, Heb. iv. 16. It is not meant that they are to be always on their knees, or speaking the words of prayer. They can pray in their hearts without speaking at all; and though their hands are busily employed, Christ is so perfectly acquainted with their thoughts, he knows that they are depending constantly on him. And as the sap that makes the branches green is always secretly flowing to them from the root; so the grace which believers need is constantly supplied by Christ. He has promised that the Holy Spirit should remain with them, to remind them of him, and teach them to do his will, John xvi. 13, 14. And he has left them an example that they should follow his steps. They are to consider how he acted in all the various occurrences of his life on earth. If they have an opportunity of instructing those who know nothing of God, they are to remember how Jesus laboured to teach the ignorant, how patiently he bore with their dulness, and how kindly he always spoke to such as desired information. If they see persons in poverty or sickness, whom they could relieve, they are to recollect how he felt for the condition of those who were hungry, and how readily he healed the diseases of every sick person who applied to him. While they are thus made to abound in every good work, they are kept humble. If they trust for a moment to their good habits, or good resolutions, they fail; for "without Christ they can do nothing." They certainly will become more and more fruitful, the longer they are joined to the True Vine: but this will just be because they feel more and more their own weakness, and trust more entirely in him.

In verse 6, the Saviour describes the condition of those who do not abide in him. A branch broken off from a vine is fit for nothing but to be burned; for the wood of the vine is not so useful as most other kinds of timber, Ezek. xv. And those who leave the true vine shall at last be gathered together, and "cast into the furnace of fire, where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Let none think that they are safe, because they once felt pleasure in hearing of Christ, and seemed to do many good things. Many a branch is burned, that once was green and flourishing. Whatever appearance your conduct might formerly have, if you are not now bearing the fruit of righteousness, there is not the smallest reason to think that you ever were in Christ. The apostle Paul had long been a faithful branch in the True Vine; yet he put no confidence in his past conduct; his earnest desire was, that he might "be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ," Phil. iii. 9. It is only those who endure unto the end who shall be saved, Matt. xxiv. 13. "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire," Matt. iii. 10.

In verse 7, the Saviour makes a particular promise to those who do abide in him: "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." They are permitted to make known all their wants and desires to God; he assures them that he hears their prayers, and that he will answer them, Phil. iv. 6; Isa. lxv. 24. Prayer is not a task to them; when they pray, they feel just as children do when they ask their mother for bread. They are always to remember that their Father in heaven knows best what is good for them; and they ought to be careful not to ask any thing which he would disapprove. But they know that what is good the Lord will give; and "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." How happy are those children who abide in Christ, and are thus permitted to ask all they want from God! They need not be afraid, even if their earthly parents die, or become unable to provide for them. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," 1 Tim. iv. 8. The Saviour had said at another time, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven," Matt. v. 16; and here, in verse 8, he says, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much

fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The enemies of Christ refused to believe that he was sent from God; they despised his disciples, and perhaps expected that after their Master was dead, they would soon forget all his instructions. But, instead of this, they became much more bold and active in doing his will, even when they were cruelly treated, Acts iv. 19, 20; v. 17-32. They were always ready to confess that it was the grace of Christ which made them holy and useful as they were. And as they were not ashamed or afraid to call themselves his disciples, so he would graciously consider them as such, and approve of them, whatever foolish men might say.

The further we read in this beautiful discourse, the more must we be struck with the tenderness of the Saviour's affection to his disciples, and his anxiety to assure them that it should continue to be the same after he had left them. In ver. 9 he says, that his love for them was as great as his Father's love to him; and he begged them to continue in his love; that is, that they should continue to love him, delight in thinking of him, and look forward with joy to the prospect of seeing him again. The Saviour was about to sit down at the right hand of God, to be worshipped as King of kings and Lord of lords; yet so dearly did he love those few poor people who had believed his word, that he could not bear to think of them forgetting him. And he had just before appointed an ordinance to be observed, for the very purpose of keeping them in remembrance of him, 1 Cor. xi. 23-26. As the Mediator, (see explanation of John x. 1,) Christ had carefully and constantly kept all the commands of his Father, and on this account his Father loved him; he was satisfied and delighted to behold the obedience of his beloved Son. When the Saviour should be absent from his disciples, the only way in which they could show that they still loved him, would be by keeping his commands. He tells them, in verse 10, that as long as they continued to do so he should continue to love them. They must never suppose that their labour was in vain, or that their Master

was indifferent whether they served him or not. Now does any one of my readers wish to know if he is a branch of the True Vine? If so, this verse may help him to find it out; read also chap. xiv. 15—23; xv. 14. Had you ever a very dear friend who went to a distance, and was absent a long time? Did you not try to think of every advice and instruction which he had given you? And did it not cheer you to think, that when he came back he would approve of what you had done while he was away? Well, did you ever feel the same pleasure in doing the will of Christ? Are you often asking yourself, "What can I do to please my Saviour?" And are you always desiring and endeavouring to behave so that he may commend you at last? Matt. xxv. 23, 34, 40. If such are your wishes and endeavours, you may feel a constant satisfaction in the thought, that he is looking at you, and is pleased with your trying to serve him. Though you are but a child, and may not be able to do any thing that others can notice as being done for Christ, yet, if you really love him, every time that you readily obey your parents, or sincerely strive against petulance or anger, you are keeping his commandments, and continuing in his love. But if you have no pleasure in trying to please him, remember he has said, "He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings," John xiv. 24. Oh, think of those solemn words, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha," that is, "Let him be accursed when the Lord shall come," 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

In verse 11, the Saviour plainly tells the reason why he had spoken these things to his disciples. If they believed what he had said, they would continue to give joy to him by their holiness and obedience; they would also be able to rejoice themselves. He immediately after told them, that they might expect to suffer a great deal for his sake, verses 18—21. And, chap. xvi. 33, he says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation;" but he adds, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." So, in the verse we are considering, he speaks of their joy being full, even while they were in this world of

sorrow. Many people, who do not believe the words of Christ, think that they can have a great deal of joy; they say they are enjoying themselves, while they are sinning against God. Some rejoice because they have plenty of the good things of this life: others feel joyful when they see their children well and cheerful: and some are glad, because they are young and healthy, and without care. But none of these kinds of joy can be called "full:" there is always a wish in the mind for something else. And such joys must very soon come to an end. The rich man may lose all his riches, and then he can no longer obtain those good things which gave him joy: children may die, and their parents will feel that they have nothing left which can give them any enjoyment, and the youngest and strongest may soon come to years, when they shall say, "I have no pleasure in them," Eccles. xii. 1. But neither poverty, nor grief, nor sickness, can take away the joy of the Christian. It is believing what Christ has spoken that makes him joyful. Whoever may be unkind, Jesus is a "Friend who loveth at all times." Whatever may be lost, there is an "inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation," 1 Pet. i. 4, 5. And if a disciple of Christ has such joy on earth, what will it be when he shall come to that inheritance in heaven? This blessedness every sinner may obtain, by believing in Christ. And, oh, what a happy thing it would be, if all who read this would listen to his voice, and believe what he has spoken to them! Then his joy would remain in them, and their joy would be full. Then they would be the "ransomed of the Lord, who shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away," Isa. xxxv. 10.

